



The Atlanta BeltLine. (Goldman, 2017)

EXPANDING EQUITY IN SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: CAN ORGANIZATIONS ADAPT?

BY:	NICK JOHNSON
DATE:	DECEMBER 11, 2018
ADVISOR:	DR. NISHA BOTCHWEY
PREPARED FOR:	FALL 2018 CAPSTONE PROJECT
IN COMPLETION OF:	CITY & REGIONAL PLANNING MASTER'S DEGREE
INSTITUTION:	GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Across the United States, inequitable distribution of urban resources is of increasing concern to city planners, government officials, and residents in the country's major cities. Scholars have found that the wealth gap between rich and poor is the widest it has ever been (Piketty, Saez, & Zucman, 2018; Wolff, 2017). Affordable housing availability and accessibility is very low, and needs are far from being met in cities like New York (Ellen & Weselcouch, 2015) and Atlanta (Housing Justice League & Research|Action Cooperative, 2017). While these issues are urgent, they are also controversial among policymakers, local politicians, and other powerful stakeholders who verbally commit to the pursuit of equality but do not—or cannot—incorporate equitable community engagement strategies that ensure equal outcomes are achieved (Elwood, 2005; Ghose, 2005; Zapata & Bates, 2015). The City of Atlanta, frequently featured on lists compiling the least equitable cities in the United States (Ponczek & Lu, 2016), has given lip service to developing equitable urban planning projects based on race, class, and geography many times, only to adopt policies and processes that are viewed as counterproductive. The Atlanta BeltLine presents a recent case.

In a mission to unite the diverse and disparate neighborhoods of the city, the Atlanta BeltLine—an urban greenspace and economic development project that will form a 22-mile ring around downtown—has been both celebrated and criticized. The BeltLine has spurred massive real estate and economic development projects in Eastside neighborhoods like Old Fourth Ward and Inman Park. However, the project has faced serious criticisms from citizens, especially among residents in lower-income, Southside neighborhoods like Peoplestown and Adair Park (Housing Justice League & Research|Action Cooperative, 2017). A cadre of scholars, journalists, and activists have demonstrated that property values have risen sharply within the tax allocation district (TAD) that funds the BeltLine (Immergluck, 2009; Immergluck & Balan, 2018; Roy, 2015), often resulting in the displacement of long-term residents who cannot afford rising property taxes. Meanwhile, the city has lost affordable housing units at far greater rates than they are being replaced (Dobbins, 2018; Housing Justice League & Research|Action Cooperative, 2017; Mariano, Conway, & Ondieki, 2017). Though city officials and BeltLine leaders have sworn to build new units for residents, progress is slow, the community's trust is wearing thin, and the units will likely remain out of reach for many who make under 60% of the area median income (AMI).

A prevailing sentiment regarding the BeltLine is that the need for amenities it will bring is great, but these amenities have been poorly distributed. Residents in Westside and Southside neighborhoods—many of whom are minorities, low-income, or both—in particular have great need for access to recreational greenspace, housing, job opportunities, and transportation. In a report by Housing Justice League and Research|Action Cooperative (2017), the authors find that community members have high hopes for development, greenspace, and jobs to come to their neighborhood. By the same token, they fear that development spurred by the BeltLine will not honor their neighborhood's unique needs and character, and that they will be forced and priced out as a result. Additionally, many residents believe their wishes will be ignored based on past

projects. Historical planning efforts led by the City of Atlanta, from interstate highway construction and Mercedes-Benz Stadium to the recent proposal for redevelopment of “the Gulch” (Keenan, 2018b), have de-prioritized local needs and demands in favor of the capital interests of other regional stakeholders (Housing Justice League & Research|Action Cooperative, 2017).

There is a disconnect between the Atlanta BeltLine’s values and the actions they take, especially regarding the goal to promote equal outcomes for minority and impoverished residents in neglected neighborhoods. This problem befalls many organizational entities with complex organizational structures, like the BeltLine. Swyngedouw (2005) refers to these structures as “institutional ensembles,” while others refer to them as “quasigovernmental agencies” (Immergluck & Balan, 2018), “collaborative governance” (Ghose, 2005), “public-private partnerships,” or more simply, “regionalism” (Benner & Pastor, 2015; Powell, 1999). Actors within these structures tend to disagree amongst themselves on key issues facing the project. Indeed, the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership’s (ABP) 2013 report on equity within the BeltLine project area highlights this challenge as it pertains to affordable housing (Atlanta BeltLine Partnership, 2013).

There is also a disconnect between the complex network behind the BeltLine project and community members impacted by it regarding what constitutes “equitable development.” Some of this misalignment can be attributed to an issue of scope. The city and the BeltLine are planning for a larger geographical area than one neighborhood, and thus adopt broader strategies for the creation of affordable housing and jobs. Yet residents of Peoplestown, Old Fourth Ward, and Adair Park have proposed ideas and suggestions for how to develop their communities in ways that preserve neighborhood character and enable residents to remain (Housing Justice League & Research|Action Cooperative, 2017). Additionally, some scholars argue that equal outcomes in sustainability infrastructure projects cannot be achieved as long as these organizations are beholden to funders, politicians, and other actors within a capital-based system (Roy, 2015; Swyngedouw, 2005). Others hold that these outcomes can be achieved through true inclusion, democratic communication, and reasoned debate (Benner & Pastor, 2015; Innes & Booher, 2004).

These observations beg the question: how can community members, planning professionals, government officials, and developers come together to create a sustainable and equitable BeltLine that serves everyone, especially residents among marginalized communities? Moreover, can an organization that has come under criticism for not promoting equitable development change course several years into implementation of its primary project?

In this report, I will investigate the capacity of organizations characterized by Rina Ghose’s (2005) typology of regional collaborative governance to promote equitable development of their project, using the Atlanta BeltLine as a case study. Specifically, I am analyzing the evolution of the BeltLine’s direct interaction with community members (or lack thereof), including their community engagement framework, methods, and approach. Criticism regarding equity has been levied against the BeltLine by various groups; as a result, I conducted interviews

with individuals that capture this variety, including those directly involved with organizations that support the BeltLine as well as community members with little to no official power. These interviews, along with insights gleaned from academic literature on equitable development, news articles, and the BeltLine's own publications, reveal challenges facing planning efforts formed by regional collaborative governance.

It is important to note that, in many cases, challenges facing the BeltLine's ability to advance equal outcomes for communities affected by the project are rooted in its structure and its position within a larger, capital-based system. The system itself is also responsible for these challenges, and could explain why the BeltLine has not focused "enough" on equity. Acknowledging these obstacles exist across layers of planning projects, jurisdictions, and governmental agencies can hopefully point to solutions that lead to a sustainable and equitable BeltLine for all.

ROOTS OF COMMUNICATIVE PLANNING

To understand how to create equitable planning processes now, we must first turn to historical efforts and foundational theories of urban planning and communication. At the beginning of the 1980s, scholars began to understand that a new paradigm for expanding equity was needed within planning. Until then, Paul Davidoff's paradigm of "advocacy and pluralism in planning" (Davidoff, 1965) and Norman Krumholz's consistent push for equity in Cleveland (Krumholz, 1982) were the most prominent examples of how to execute equitable formal planning processes that created space for community needs and demands. Though there are fundamental differences in their approaches, both were seen in their time as innovative attempts at planning that expanded choice and incorporated justice and equity for communities.

Afterwards, other strands of planning theory began to emerge that turned inward on the nature of the planner's role itself. Scholars named and recognized systems of power based on race, gender, class, and other systems that affected the goal of Krumholz—and urban planning more broadly—of expanding choice for all (Krumholz, 1982, p. 163). These scholars sought to advance a new planning paradigm that went by various names, including communicative planning (Forester, 1982), collaborative planning (Healey, 1992), and reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983). The guiding principle behind these paradigms involved the need to correct power imbalances through unbiased, honest, and open communication.

Forester's work is particularly useful for understanding how to build equitable planning processes within regional collaborative governance planning projects. In "Planning in the Face of Power," Forester (1982) turns the planner's lens inward to examine power imbalances in planning processes that result from misinformation and miscommunication. He argues that planners can knowingly and unknowingly perpetuate inequitable systems of power through routine actions and choices. Public engagement exercises are especially prone to perpetuating power structures, and they must be conducted with thoughtful recognition of how power influences people's willingness to participate fully and honestly (Forester, 1982). His orientation to communicative planning assumes that constant reflection and self-criticism is necessary to

achieve true collaboration with communities.

Forester follows this orientation throughout his body of work, including publications from decades later (Forester, 1999, 2013). In *The Deliberative Practitioner*, he expands his theory of planning in the face of power to include concrete techniques and advice for planners engaging communities. Specifically, Forester explores the mechanics of listening, the value of ethnographic research, and the importance of stories and anecdotal evidence to urban planning projects (Forester, 1999). Forester's emphasis on the reciprocity of stories, in that they are told and spread by planners and citizens (planned-for) alike, puts the onus on professionals to reckon with their role in the production of neighborhood history, culture, and stability (and instability).

Qualitative input from community members historically has occupied a more passive role in the development of planning projects, if it has played any significant role at all. Indeed, Forester's writings have powerful implications for today's planning efforts, including the BeltLine. Throughout the BeltLine's inception and implementation, anecdotal evidence of the instability caused by the project is often overshadowed by robust economic figures and other "quality of life" indicators published by the City of Atlanta and Atlanta BeltLine Inc., ABI for short (Atlanta BeltLine Partnership, 2013; Housing Justice League & Research|Action Cooperative, 2017). This has resulted in simultaneous hopes and fears held by community residents of low socioeconomic status.

Shortly after Forester's 1999 piece, Henry Sanoff published a definitive volume on community participation techniques within urban planning and design, many of which rely substantially on Forester's underlying theories of the importance of anecdotal evidence, active listening, and democratic dialogue. Far from dry descriptions of verbal and collaborative processes, Sanoff also elaborates the underlying mechanisms behind behavior change, negotiation, and conflict resolution, topics that are notably missing from Forester's early work (Sanoff, 2000). Forester corrects this oversight in a recent article focused on "critical pragmatism" (Forester, 2013). Whereas in previous works Forester delineated strategies to foster engaged and democratic dialogue, here he addresses how to approach situations in which this type of dialogue fails. He points to two crucial tenets of critical pragmatism. First, planners must define the conflict and understand the different perspectives on all sides. This process necessarily involves dropping presumptions of perspective and opinions of others' *intentions* in exchange for careful consideration of the *impact* actions have. Secondly, planners must reckon with the dangers of debate, which is adversarial in nature, and must encourage elegant solutions achieved through dialogue. Again, he maintains that both of these require tremendous listening skill on the part of planners, which requires an understanding of how power can shape conversation, dialogue, and negotiation (Forester, 2013).

Thus, Forester's work has evolved over time to fit the needs of modern planning challenges. He offers revised advice on the nature of debate within planning and how to resolve conflict while centering an understanding of power dynamics between planner and citizen. This is especially important in the context of the Atlanta BeltLine and other regional collaborative governance structures. Forester began writing at a time when planning power was centralized in

municipal planning offices. Now, with increasingly complex models like public-private partnerships and regional stakeholder coalitions, opportunities for dialogue are even more plentiful, as are the challenges of maintaining true participation from all parties.

One additional piece of literature must be reviewed for its importance to the field of planning, community engagement, and citizen participation. Sherry Arnstein's famous work, *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969), predates prominent communicative planning theories by over a decade, but remains incredibly influential in helping diagnose and devise community engagement strategies that expand participation and, by extension, promote equitable techniques that lift up marginalized voices. Her ladder is divided between eight rungs or categories that define styles of participation. These are depicted in Figure 1 (found in the Appendix), and range from non-participatory strategies ("manipulation" and "therapy"), to tokenistic strategies ("informing," "consultation," and "placation"), and finally to strategies that promote "citizen power" ("partnership," "delegated power," and "citizen control") (Arnstein, 1969). Arnstein emphasizes that participation must include "have-nots" in planning processes, but specifically in a way that does not become "empty ritual," (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216) with real capacity to influence the outcome of a policy or project. Only when citizens participate through partnership or control can equitable processes be advanced. Like Forester, however, Arnstein's conception of participation involved direct civic engagement through governmental structures, which have been complicated by coalitional forms of planning. Arnstein's work remains widely read, followed, and debated today (Botchwey et al., forthcoming) and could provide insight for how to build equitable planning processes for the Atlanta BeltLine.

As Arnstein's and Forester's theories have aged and evolved, so have those of his contemporaries. Judith Innes & David Booher (2004) directly respond to both Arnstein, Forester, and Sanoff, arguing that participation strategies do not work, do not increase trust in planners' ability to capture residents' values accurately, and often sow seeds of disharmony within communities they are trying to improve. Though these initial assertions seem like they would counter Forester's assumptions, Innes & Booher agree with him more often than they disagree. They discard traditional "participatory" exercises, replacing them with collaborative participation and more "transformative" strategies as preferred solutions for their ability to foster true dialogue (Innes & Booher, 2004).

However much they defend collaborative participation, Innes and Booher leave the concept open to critique. While they acknowledge its strengths, including that it builds social capital, inspires creative problem-solving, and builds networks, they question the trustworthiness of the dialogue itself when participants are influenced by neoliberal ideology. Can equal power truly be achieved when planning for disenfranchised communities? How do we ensure true dialogue and inclusion? A modern question that could be posed to the authors is as follows: when "official" groups (i.e. official planning departments or regional governance structures) outnumber "non-official" groups (i.e. community organizations), how can true equitable processes be created? The Atlanta BeltLine planning process suffers from this type of power imbalance.

CRITIQUES OF COMMUNICATIVE PLANNING AND MODERN DEFINITIONS OF EQUITY

There are two main threads of critique that address communicative and collaborative planning. First, they offer direct avenues for citizen participation within planning processes; however, there is a difference between participation and inclusion (Quick & Feldman, 2011, p. 272). The second thread explores the idea that democracy within planning, especially among “stakeholder groups” is simply not possible under a neoliberal ideology whose interests are explicitly tied to the accumulation of capital (Swyngedouw, 2005).

Kathryn Quick & Martha Feldman focus on the difference between participation and inclusion. They hold that engagement techniques ought to accomplish more than just organize meetings; rather, they must shape opinion and structure within planning. In other words, input should not be simply gathered (participation) but instead solutions must be created in conjunction with community members (inclusion). In service of their argument for inclusion, they also delve into literature on communities of practice, extending the popular conception of what makes a “community” beyond geographical boundaries into networks of people that share practices (Quick & Feldman, 2011).

This idea further breaks down the division between planner and “planned-for.” By creating a community of practice between planners and beneficiaries, true democratic engagement can flourish within planning processes. Quick & Feldman offer strong case study examples of various plans that operated across two spectrums: high-low participation and high-low inclusion. They found that inclusive practices include engaging multiple ways of knowing, coproduction of ideas, and de-emphasizing deadlines in the interest of finding worthy solutions. Lastly, they respond to Forester’s strategy to reduce conflict by engaging with conflict and difference *as an asset*, which will be explored further by other articles reviewed in this study (Quick & Feldman, 2011).

Similar to Quick & Feldman, Benner & Pastor (2015) follow a similar line of critique, but do so with an explicit focus on regional planning processes that share similarities with the BeltLine. They attempt to marry conflict and collaboration at the regional scale, arguing that “principled conflict” will push equity issues to the forefront within collaborative governance. Principled conflict allows everyone involved in the process to establish common ground before embarking on a planning effort. They acknowledge concerns and past failures of planning to adequately maintain an equity focus during regional and multi-jurisdictional planning processes; “principled conflict” attempts to address this through three “Rs”: shared Roots, commitment to the Relationship, and Reason over ideology (Benner & Pastor, 2015).

For many scholars, Benner & Pastor’s argument is fundamentally flawed. Though they prioritize conflict as an asset, similar to Quick & Feldman, their concept of principled conflict relies on transcending ideology, which conceivably could include an individual or community orientation of justice, fairness, and equity. Similarly, what incentive does a powerful institution, like a city government or a real estate developer, have to put aside an ideology that is already dominant? Theoretically, to truly achieve democratic planning processes that lead to equal

outcomes, all actors must start with a clean slate.

Many authors assert that this is impossible (Ghose, 2005; Powell, 1999; Swyngedouw, 2005). The most vocal critics consist of Erick Swyngedouw and Rina Ghose, who take a theoretical and practical approach, respectively, to deconstructing how ideology persistently shapes planning processes at the regional level and limits individual and community power. Swyngedouw analyzes the issue from a bird's-eye view, discussing the difference between government and governance and its effect on democratic participation on global and municipal scales. He argues that institutional "ensembles," meaning broad coalitions of state, nonprofit, and private actors (his examples include the EU and IMF), ultimately perpetuate the authoritarianism of a state structure (Swyngedouw, 2005). Not only does each institution firmly reinforce dominant ideology on its own, but when amassed in a collaborative structure, organizations reinforce this ideology even more strongly between them. As the state begins to cede power to broader and more geographically-specific institutions, it imbues them with regulatory powers and oversight that did not exist before. Though Swyngedouw does not provide explicit examples, the BeltLine's relationships with extra-jurisdictional organizations like the Fulton County Board of Commissioners, Invest Atlanta, and other quasigovernmental entities fit this description. Creating a vast network of institutional ensembles, he argues, jumbles the planning process and places extra burdens on citizens to understand how to navigate processes of community development and planning (Swyngedouw, 2005).¹

In contrast, Swyngedouw also explores the evolution of "civil society" as a realm that occupies space between the borders of private and public domains. Thus, this civil space becomes a place where social order is routinely challenged. He argues that by bestowing the term, "stakeholder," onto groups or individuals, it removes citizens from a space of dissidence and invites them into state-sanctioned roles, often pacifying them. On the surface, it appears that occupying a state-sanctioned role would increase a community member's power. Swyngedouw disagrees, arguing that assigning the label of "stakeholder" is an act of state power that masquerades as an equalizer. Additionally, it removes structures of accountability and allows for variable degrees of power between stakeholder groups, thereby perpetuating established power structures inaccessible to the community member.

Ghose (2005) builds upon Swyngedouw's theoretical foundation for how collaborative governance structures restrict rather than expand power, discussing the constraints and opportunities that are created through these structures. Specifically, the neoliberalization of planning processes through public-private partnerships puts especially burdensome requirements onto neighborhood groups that must exercise their rights to citizenship through new ways (Ghose, 2005). Sarah Elwood builds upon this by calling for researches to develop "practices and collaborations that disrupt the production of inequality" in urban space (Elwood, 2005, p. 264). Only then can planning processes that incorporate citizen participation effectively exert change through democratic and just avenues.

Authors from both of these critical strands of communicative planning offer useful

¹ This phenomenon is reflected by certain comments by interviewees, which will be explored later.

lessons for the Atlanta BeltLine's planning process. Quick & Feldman's call for true inclusion could be adopted in advance of visioning processes and engagement with the communities of Peopletown and other Southside neighborhoods. Meanwhile, Ghose and Elwood's findings could influence the creation of planning structures outside of the official BeltLine community engagement framework. Exploration of a third, more specific viewpoint tied to issues of race and racism is necessary for a complete picture of how critiques of communicative planning and regional collaborative governance affect marginalized communities in the BeltLine project area. John Powell's exploration of race, poverty, and urban sprawl (1999) is especially important for understanding historical critiques of regional planning efforts that have affected residents of Southside Atlanta neighborhoods for decades.

Powell begins by offering brief histories of sprawl's effect on the civil rights movement and white flight. He argues that there is a "reciprocal relationship between sprawl and racialized concentrated poverty," and that sprawl has been shown to create concentrated poverty in inner-city, majority-black neighborhoods. More concisely, he argues that political fragmentation disables desegregation. Powell explores this tension between redevelopment and community preservation as well, stating that communities suffering from racialized, concentrated poverty have resisted planning efforts at a regional scale for fear of losing their cultural identity, control, and political power within their community (Powell, 1999, p. 7). Writing in 1999, this ominously foreshadows current neighborhood change following the construction of the BeltLine.

These fears—loss of cultural identity, a lack of control, and suppression of community power—inform modern debates about what constitutes "equity" in planning processes. Anna Livia Brand's (2015) masterful piece on defining equity in the 21st century provides an astute follow-up on many of Powell's arguments regarding community preservation, prioritization, and power. She argues that equity today cannot be defined as a static concept. Beginning with communicative planning literature, she holds that older theories (à la Forester, Schon) generally fail to examine root causes of systemic inequity. She refers to radical theorists like Swyngedouw, who argue that the democratic state's primary interest is to reinforce the dominance of neoliberal capitalism, which effectively "constrains" potential tools in the planner's toolbox.

She then turns to an examination of post-Katrina New Orleans and how the city's post-disaster recovery efforts were highly focused on private sector investment, free-market recovery, and "retrenchment" of welfare programs that stifled community-led efforts to rebuild. Brand highlights three neighborhoods whose residents possess different conceptions of equity: Lakeview (most aligned with neoliberal ideology and also mostly white), Treme (mostly black, but rapidly gentrifying post-Katrina), and Lower Ninth Ward (mostly black and most distrustful of the city). Lakeview residents seemed most concerned with other communities getting more redevelopment funds than their "fair share," and that Lakeview residents should be rewarded based on their ability to "take care of ourselves" (Brand, 2015, p. 254), even though public and private investment played a large role in Lakeview's recovery. Treme residents were most concerned with accelerating gentrification, which served as a reminder of historical traumas left by past urban planning efforts. Lower Ninth Ward residents believed from the start that the city-

or university-led planning efforts would not yield the improvements they wished to see in the neighborhood. In fact, they found their own efforts to engage in planning exercises thwarted by “official” planning activities.

Ultimately, Brand demonstrates three widely divergent conceptions of equity. Lakeview residents’ view conceptualized fairness as upholding existing racial, class, and ethnic inequities. Treme residents’ view of equity is rooted in past racial inequalities and continues to be constructed based on place- and memory-based histories of the area. This is the same for residents of the Lower Ninth Ward, who point out that neighborhoods have developed very differently based on investment from the city. In her conclusion, Brand highlights the need for planners interested in building equitable community engagement processes must pay attention to how some voices are privileged over others, even in “democratic” settings. Brand’s research uncovers that these privileged voices can influence how a central concept like “equity” can be defined differently across groups, and that planners must recognize this (Brand, 2015, p. 261).

This final idea informs the struggle to create equitable planning processes within a collaborative governance structure. Planners must recognize that other citizens—like Lakeview residents in Brand’s example, or new residents in northern and eastern neighborhoods along the BeltLine—possess privileged voices. When planners themselves possess privileged voices, additional measures that deemphasize those voices must be taken in order to make room for marginalized residents. Powell’s and Brand’s findings demonstrate the need not just for more democratic planning processes, but processes that honor and correct for persistent, oppressive power structures that have plagued urban areas over time.

CASE STUDIES

As the BeltLine moves forward and Atlanta BeltLine Inc. (ABI) continues to conduct community engagement exercises, it is important to refer to case studies where democratic and equitable engagement has occurred for examples of how the BeltLine’s exercises can be improved. Recent pieces by Anderson et al. (2016), Roy (2015), and Trudeau (2018) offer unique perspectives on the successes and challenges faced by sustainable development initiatives like the BeltLine.

Chief among them is Trudeau’s study on social equity in sustainable development practice, which analyzes neighborhood-scale developments following New Urbanism design principles. Trudeau’s primary argument rests on the idea that in order for redevelopment projects to incorporate equitable measures into their planning processes, they must be led by an organization which prioritizes social equity from beginning to end. Trudeau’s definition of social sustainability is refreshing, stating that true sustainability is concerned with both equal access to resource and redistributive justice (Trudeau, 2018). Through case study research conducted in Austin, Denver, and the Twin Cities, he discusses the mechanics of how certain neighborhoods maintained a focus on equity throughout their redevelopment. He reemphasizes the importance of agencies with access to capital naming and proving their commitment to equality as an outcome. This includes technocrats putting their money where their mouths are: investing in

affordable housing development and policy, enacting inclusionary zoning ordinances, and when all else fails, patiently insisting on equal outcomes. Trudeau also briefly addresses the pitfalls of public engagement as the primary driver of social equity, echoing others' assertions (Quick & Feldman, 2011; Roy, 2015; Swyngedouw, 2005) that privileged voices can coopt public participation processes, sometimes intentionally but most often unknowingly (Trudeau, 2018).

Anderson et al. (2016) reveal similar findings from their case study on water negotiations in Montana's Yellowstone River Basin. The authors bring Swyngedouw's (2005) philosophical perspective to issues of water management faced by the Yellowstone Basin Advisory Council (Anderson et al., 2016). They focus on "dissensus" as a collaboration tool with remarkable potential, echoing the concept of "principled conflict" (Benner & Pastor, 2015). They argue that dissensus is critical for true democratic processes to occur, alleging that the pursuit of consensus coerces individuals who would normally object into agreement (Anderson et al., 2016).

Many valuable lessons can be learned from these case studies, even while the projects explored differ in nature from the Atlanta BeltLine. Certain lessons from both provide valuable insight, including establishing dissensus as an acceptable and encouraged practice (Anderson et al., 2016), equitably appropriating funds to demonstrate a commitment to equity (Trudeau, 2018), and co-producing solutions with community members (Quick & Feldman, 2011). Ultimately, all of these case studies touch on the practice of producing true participation in planning projects, successfully or unsuccessfully, and the pitfalls associated with doing so.

The need for these lessons is clear, based on Parama Roy's case study (2015) of the Atlanta BeltLine project itself. She uses the BeltLine as a backdrop for exploring how planning under neoliberalism has shifted the planning function to public-private partnerships that rely on the market to dictate urban growth patterns and improvement projects. She argues that inviting ordinary citizens to the negotiating table without taking additional steps to include or implement their feedback results in the false appearance of democracy. Instead, the plethora of state-sanctioned agencies are given priority, which strengthens the market's control over the project. As examples, she points to the BeltLine's tendency to appoint new residents of neighborhoods to steering committees that seldom meet, or the lack of follow-through that afflicts citizen groups like Atlanta's neighborhood planning unit (NPU) system (Roy, 2015). Though Roy does not give concrete examples for how to expand equity within the BeltLine framework, other literature reviewed in this introduction can offer suggested solutions.

This review—catalogued in Table 1—is intended to mine the literature for useful advice on how to engage community members in inclusive, democratic, and just planning processes of the 21st century. Existing literature on regional collaborative governance, definitions of equity, and approaches to community engagement combine to offer a firm theoretical foundation for research into how the BeltLine has expanded or limited equitable community engagement and inclusion in its development process. This foundation is crucial for determining the BeltLine's structural ability or inability to expand equity based on its position within a larger, inequitable system that privileges certain voices over others. By examining the history of the Atlanta BeltLine, exploring its community engagement strategies over time, and listening to community

members and organizational stakeholders, it is possible to chart a path for the BeltLine's future community engagement efforts as it enters its final phase.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To truly capture how the community engagement process for the Atlanta BeltLine has evolved, and how its approach to expanding equity has similarly evolved, I drew from several data sources. First, I attended several community and committee meetings throughout the months of September and October 2018, composing field notes for each meeting. These included quarterly briefings, Tax Allocation District Advisory Committee (TADAC) meetings, and Design Review Committee (DRC) meetings. These meetings brought me into contact with concerned individuals, as well as larger contingencies from advocacy groups like *Housing Justice League* and *BeltLine Rail Now!*. My objective for these meetings was to learn the purpose of each meeting type and to observe how BeltLine staff interacted and communicated with community members and institutional actors.

Secondly, I conducted a news review in Nexis Uni for historical articles about the BeltLine's creation, including articles that both supported and criticized the BeltLine's actions, intent, or structure. Added to these news articles were official BeltLine documents, such as the Equitable Development Assessment (EDA), Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP), and the BeltLine's official website, which contributed much to the BeltLine's chronological formation. I focused my news searches on terms that have entered popular discourse about the BeltLine, including "equity," "gentrification," "displacement," "TAD (tax allocation district)," "criticism," and "concern," as well as general terms like "history" and "progress."

Lastly, I conducted in-person interviews with key community members and organizational stakeholders. These ranged from BeltLine staff to committee members to grassroots advocates. My criteria for selecting organizational stakeholders were that they must be employed by either ABI or ABP and also work in the community engagement realm. My criteria for selecting citizens were that they must live in neighborhoods affected by the BeltLine and either serve on BeltLine committees or work with advocacy groups that have pressured BeltLine leaders regarding BeltLine progress or policies. In all, I conducted seven interviews, transcribing six (since one person declined to be recorded) and coding them for major themes.² Through these interviews, I was able to identify distinct themes regarding equity, community engagement needs and wishes, and priorities for different groups that illuminate the challenges facing large-scale rails-to-trails projects like the BeltLine. In the following sections, I summarize feedback received from these two groups, community members and organizational stakeholders; elaborate on these several themes, analyzing them within their historical context; and determine how these themes

² Sample codes include differing conceptions of equity ("equity as awareness," "equity as geographical," "equity as race- or class-based"), opinions of BeltLine community engagement ("BeltLine needs to be more creative," "BeltLine is not doing enough," "BeltLine can't do more"), urban issues ("affordable housing," "gentrification," "transit," "parks & greenspace"), and other assorted codes ("Perception of BeltLine purpose," "new leadership," "transparency," "organizational structure").

ought to inform the community engagement structure.

HISTORY OF THE ATLANTA BELTLINE

To complete our analysis of how planning efforts like the Atlanta BeltLine, which operates under a regional collaborative governance structure, expand or restrict equitable community engagement, the history of the BeltLine itself must be scrutinized. Surprisingly, this has not been documented extensively in much of the literature on the BeltLine's progress and consequences. In this section, I analyze key events from the BeltLine's history and popular reactions to them, paying particular attention to how the content and role of community feedback has evolved.

The Atlanta BeltLine was famously conceived in 1999 by Ryan Gravel, a Georgia Tech graduate student from the School of City and Regional Planning, in his Master's thesis (Gravel, 1999). The report outlined a 22-mile rails-to-trails project that would be built on top of unused rail lines that encircled the city. The hypothetical project would connect dozens of neighborhoods together by providing transit and greenspace services, fueled by an economic growth engine that would benefit all quadrants of the city (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018b).

Gravel has gone on record saying that he had no expectations that the Atlanta BeltLine would become a reality (Fausset, 2016); yet, the BeltLine slowly gained citizen support as a transformative project for the City of Atlanta through Gravel's own grassroots organizing, enthusiastic members of City Council, as well as through Friends of the BeltLine, an advocacy organization spearheading an aggressive promotional campaign. This support came from citizens primarily, but the project also began gaining traction among city leaders (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018e).

Three early reports cemented the idea that the BeltLine could become a reality. The first, commissioned by Mayor Shirley Jackson, sought to determine the feasibility of using a Tax Allocation District (TAD) to fund the BeltLine's capital improvement costs. This called for the creation of the Tax Allocation District Steering Committee -- a precursor to the current Tax Allocation District Advisory Committee (TADAC) -- to oversee the report and give a final ruling on the proposed payment structure. The other report, commissioned by the Trust for Public Land and authored by Alex Garvin and Associates (2004), sought to use the BeltLine corridor to tie together existing parks and greenspace, transit, and neighborhoods within a larger "public realm framework" that all Atlantans could enjoy (Garvin, 2004). The Metropolitan Atlanta Regional Transit Authority, or MARTA, also commissioned a study on transit alternatives. These reports together assembled a clearer picture of how the future of this rails-to-trails corridor could take shape (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018e).

During this time, the BeltLine was simply a project of Invest Atlanta, the city's development arm with a new name (changed from Atlanta Development Authority). News articles show that some community members outside the grassroots organizing effort were leery of the BeltLine's ballooning scale from the outset. Residents brought up concerns about the urban transformation inherent in multi-million dollar economic redevelopment projects, as well

as the lack of protections regarding affordable housing and displacement (Pendered, 2005). To engage with citizens more openly, civic leaders formed the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership (ABP), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization responsible for raising funding and popular support for the BeltLine in order to “enable the Atlanta BeltLine project, engage the public, and empower residents in surrounding neighborhoods” (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018c). Either through these efforts or alongside them, in 2005 the Atlanta City Council, in conjunction with other governmental agencies, adopted the BeltLine Redevelopment Plan and passed the BeltLine TAD. According to the BeltLine’s website, this happened following periods of consistent community engagement over a six-month period (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018e).

With these new structures in place, the Atlanta BeltLine Inc. (ABI) was founded to implement the project in coordination with organizations and community members. Other organizations formed as well, both inside and outside the official organizational structure. This included TADAC to oversee the distribution of TAD funds, as well as BeltLine Network, an advocacy group of engaged citizens and nonprofit organizations interested in providing technical expertise and advice to BeltLine planners (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018e).

ABI staff immediately got to work, buying land across the city for new park development and existing park expansion (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018e; Pendered, 2005). ABP also launched a \$60 million capital campaign to further fund the project. Between accelerated fundraising efforts, land purchases, and subsidy packages for the development of affordable housing, many critics were arguing that the BeltLine was moving too quickly and recklessly (Pendered, 2005). This is partially supported by lawsuits and other conflicts that the BeltLine weathered in its early years. These included lawsuits and other opposition from developers (Pendered, 2006b), lawyers, (Donsky, 2007), the Fulton County Taxpayer Association (personal communication, I5, I6), and Atlanta Public Schools (Leslie, 2014). Though these legal challenges varied in nature, they were all emblematic of a central problem facing the BeltLine: rapidly rising property values and the resulting monetary benefit, whether real or perceived, they brought to ABI and related governmental agencies like Invest Atlanta.

In 2007, ABI was awarded increased funding from the Federal Transit Administration and gained status as MARTA’s Locally Preferred Alternative for transit planning. Community engagement efforts also saw watershed moments of participation through the formation of the BeltLine Affordable Housing Advisory Board (BAHAB) and massive public meetings with six hundred people in attendance (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018e; Pendered, 2006a). Through the Beltline Affordable Housing Trust Fund, BAHAB aims to provide 5,600 affordable rental and owner-occupied units. There is some debate about the official numbers and what the BeltLine can claim responsibility for producing: as of 2015, ABI has claimed the construction of 1,025 affordable units, but reports have listed 330 of these as being outside the BeltLine project area, leaving a dividend of 695 units produced against their goal of 5,600 by 2030 (Mariano et al., 2017). Meanwhile, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported on Dan Immergluck’s important findings that property values near the BeltLine had spiked before construction had even begun,

sometimes by as much as 68 percent (Immergluck, 2009; McWhirter, 2007).³ Additionally, ABI cites “community outcry” in reaction to their purchase of the Northeast corridor of the projected loop. In response to the outcry, ABI and TADAC joined forces to produce an Equitable Development Plan consistent with the TAD legislation passed earlier by City Council (Atlanta BeltLine Partnership, 2013, pp. 5–6).

Progress on the trail and related parks continued, with the groundbreaking of Historic Fourth Ward Park on the Eastside and a section of the Westside Trail opening on the Westside. Organizational health also improved through the first bond sales from the TAD and the creation of the Affordable Housing Task Force (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018e). Yet dissension continued to foment in surprising places, most notably within TADAC. The 38 citizens on the committee produced a letter to both the Mayor and ABI CEO Montague, alleging poor attempts to engage community members during the planning process. Montague admits these attempts as an area for growth (Donsky, 2008a). Other citizens argued that ABI was spending money in an inequitable way across Atlanta’s geography, with more money being invested in Northeastern neighborhoods, which are historically more affluent, than southern and western neighborhoods, which are historically comprised of minority and poorer residents (Donsky, 2008b).

Unfortunately, a lack of effective community engagement became one problem among many following the financial crisis in 2008. ABI leaders struggled to keep the BeltLine solvent as most of the projected money from bond sales plummeted as a result of the mortgage crisis (personal communication, I1, I5, I6). Perhaps for this reason, ABI focuses on reinvigorated community engagement during this point on the timeline featured on their website, citing public involvement in the creation of sub-area master plans. Brian Leary also took over as CEO at this point. In 2010, ABI references additional community engagement through “Art on the BeltLine” and the Atlanta BeltLine Lantern Parade. However, the more momentous development in the community engagement framework consisted of the Atlanta City Council’s adoption of Community Benefit Guiding Principles that October (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018e).

Divergent patterns of organizational progress amidst citizen disappointment continue through 2011 to 2013. ABI’s website touts boom periods of construction throughout the 2010s, with several grand openings of parks, housing projects, brownfield redevelopment, and progress on the Eastside trail (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018e). At the same time, the organization experienced staffing scandals, with top officials ousted over unethical expenditures (Bluestein, 2012). Organizational leaders began to right the ship with the completion of a new Strategic Implementation Plan in 2013 (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018e; Leslie, 2013). The SIP provided a comprehensive plan for the organization’s final phases in all aspects of its development, from trail and greenspace creation to continued community engagement efforts (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2013).

From 2014 onward, criticism of the Atlanta BeltLine turned more directly and comprehensively to rising property values, displacement of residents in historic neighborhoods,

³ Immergluck (2009) found that property values increased the most within closer proximity to the BeltLine TAD and decreased gradually as they moved farther away.

and a lack of affordable housing (Greco, 2017; Immergluck & Balan, 2018; Kempner, 2016; Saval, 2016; Stafford & Mariano, 2017; Trubey, 2015; Trubey & Leslie, 2016). Having successfully built a couple sections of the 22-mile loop, citizens began taking its potential for redevelopment more seriously, both in how it would change the landscape and who could live in adjacent neighborhoods. This has set the tone for how people visualize the BeltLine's impact today. Now that the BeltLine is a tangible amenity that can benefit Atlantans, how can we ensure that *all* Atlantans can access its benefits? Is this within the BeltLine's capacity? Some authors and civic leaders argue that the very nature of the project prevents this goal from being achieved (Roy, 2015), while others are more hopeful (Fausset, 2016).

The BeltLine continues to undergo structural changes and challenges. Between 2014 and 2018, the organization had three CEOs, one of whom only stayed for one year. Funding continues to roll in from sources other than the sales from TAD bonds (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018e; personal communication, I1). Other accomplishments are unaccounted for online: the Westside Trail opened in 2017 (Miller, 2017) and the Southside Trail is currently under construction (personal communication, I7). Meanwhile, the community engagement team is soliciting feedback for the updates of the Sub-Area Master Plans, which often serve as the most direct route for citizen feedback to BeltLine staff. Currently, construction is underway on the Southside Trail, a 4.5 mile stretch of trail that runs from the Westside Trail's southeast origin in Adair Park to the Eastside Trail's southern terminus in Reynoldstown. (See Figure 2 for a projection of the full BeltLine loop and its Tax Allocation District. Figures 3 and 4 depict maps of completed sections of the Eastside and Westside Trails.)

What can be gleaned from these various histories? First, it is clear from both the BeltLine's website and news articles that the definition of "engagement" varied depending on the audience. For the BeltLine, engagement efforts consisted of feedback from committee meetings (TADAC and BAHAB), from citizens during the planning and design phases of the project (through Sub-Area Plans and quarterly briefings), as well as the less substantive category of physical usage of the trail. Meanwhile, for citizen groups like BeltLine Network, concerns about effective usage of taxpayer dollars and geographical equity were more important.

Secondly, despite a multitude of funding from various sources, it is imperative to recognize that the BeltLine struggled to pay for itself, especially following the 2008 housing crisis. Debates proliferated over the character, source, and distribution of funds from the beginning of the project to its continued construction and implementation today. I will explore this further in subsequent sections of analysis.

Another key point arising from these histories, especially the journalistic histories, involves differences of opinion and priorities between disparate factions of the public. It is important to remember that the public, or even "the community," is not monolithic, and that citizens hold diverse opinions about redevelopment projects that put pressure on the place they live. It is impossible for journalists or even ABI communications staff to accurately portray or amplify all voices, even if they intend to do so. As a result, there is inherent bias that arises from the omission of certain voices from the conversation. Relatedly, while it is true that the BeltLine

grew out of a grassroots movement, it is important to reflect on who participated in this movement, especially as it evolved into a formal organization under the purview of the Atlanta City Council. Given the lack of data on who attended early advocacy meetings, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding which voices were prioritized then in contrast to which voices are most listened to now.

Lastly, the difference between intent and impact of engagement must be emphasized. While ABI clearly devised and provided multiple opportunities for community engagement, many of which were well-attended, criticism of inadequate vehicles for community engagement persisted, suggesting a lack of satisfaction with their efforts. We will explore the ramifications of the difference between intent and impact in later sections.

ATLANTA BELTLINE INC.'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Having analyzed reactions to ABI's attempts at community engagement, it is worth dissecting their professed community engagement strategy. ABI has a wealth of information on their engagement activities online, including a list of engagement techniques, a calendar of upcoming meetings, an organizational chart of their community engagement framework, and links to social media sites with live updates on meetings in both text and video format. Interviews have indicated that it can be difficult to locate these resources online (personal communication, I4), especially for people without consistent Internet access (personal communication, I2). However, the BeltLine describes an extensive ground game as well, highlighting proactive efforts to meet people in their neighborhoods and encourage them to come to meetings.

ABI's Planning and Community Engagement Framework (Figure 5) is divided across three broad divisions: the Office of Director of Planning & Community Engagement, ABI's Board of Directors, and Community Meetings. These divisions cover the staffing structure of ABI, community representation on decision-making bodies, and community meeting typology and structure.

The community engagement team is currently comprised of three full-time staff and two fellows. It is unclear what time commitment the fellows make when they are hired. Interviews with ABI staff indicate that this is the largest ABI's community engagement team has ever been (personal communication, I5, I6). The organization also recently hired their first Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer in 2018, whose position is unexpectedly absent from the community engagement framework. ABI community engagement staff oversee the three volunteer committees, TADAC, BAHAB, and the Design Review Committee (DRC), all of which have open applications to the public. Through my interviews, it was clear that anyone can request to join these committees (personal communication, I1), though others have found that application reviewers may prevent volunteers from joining based on hidden criteria (Roy, 2015). The DRC is slightly different from TADAC and BAHAB, in that it is overseeing by the Planning Director instead of Community Engagement Officers; additionally, it requires knowledge of urban design history and standards. Therefore, membership on this committee is slightly different and more

specialized (personal communication, I1).

The community meetings are broken down by meeting type, and include Quarterly Briefings, Citywide Conversations, Study Groups, and Community Meetings. Quarterly Briefings are held four times a year by ABI staff, including executive officers and program directors. These meetings usually follow an agenda, with updates from staff on various ABI teams and a period for questions from the public that are then answered by the relevant staff member. Records of Quarterly Briefings date back to 2008. Very little information is provided on ABI's Citywide Conversations, which are "used to introduce concepts and educate the community" regarding the BeltLine (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018d). Study Groups are the vehicle through which residents can most effectively provide feedback. Divided by geographical region, Study Groups bring community residents together with BeltLine staff to discuss design, project prioritization, and other elements pertinent to the area where residents live. These are currently being updated by community engagement staff. Lastly, ABI staff hold community meetings by request, and also attend existing community meetings.

The last component of the framework consists of the community representative position on the ABI Board of Directors, which is comprised of members from several governmental and institutional partners. These include the mayor, city council members, and appointees from Invest Atlanta, the Atlanta Board of Education, and the Fulton County Board of Commissioners. The current community representative lives in the Westview neighborhood of southwest Atlanta and was formerly the president of the Westview Community Organization (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018a). Currently, she is a Program Officer at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which has provided funding to ABI projects along the Southside Trail (Green, 2018). While there is interest in keeping boards small, having one community representative for an organization that seeks to reach 45 neighborhoods underrepresents the role of community voices within ABI's leadership structure and contributes to the perceived mismatch between ABI's pledge to uphold equitable community engagement and their actions.⁴

In interviews, ABI staff stated that community engagement is "tied to the SIP" (personal communication, I5, I6), referring to the 2030 Strategic Implementation Plan adopted in 2013. A Stakeholder Analysis and Community Engagement Plan is included as an appendix in the SIP. It describes community engagement processes employed for creation of the SIP itself, specifically regarding public prioritization of future BeltLine projects (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2013, pp. 123–124). This aspect of the SIP was reiterated by ABI staff, who emphasized the public's role in choosing which projects ABI should focus on over its lifetime (personal communication, I5, I6).

The SIP's community engagement process was structured in three phases: inform, consult, and engage. Under ABI's typology, informing consists of passive methods of sharing information, including flyers, newsletters, online reading material like blogs, and news articles in mainstream media channels. Consultation refers to face-to-face engagement methods that seek to solicit information and other feedback from residents. These methods include "Lunch & Learns,"

⁴ This is especially true currently, given the position of this particular representative at an organization closely tied to the BeltLine and its funding structure.

Study Group meetings, briefings, and advisory board meetings. Lastly, engagement consists of larger public meetings reminiscent of “traditional” methods of engagement planners use to share information (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2013).

The result of these activities appears earlier in the SIP, in a section that describes the priorities for each department’s future work. In each department, equity is raised as a priority, both in terms of the ability to serve disadvantaged populations and the equitable geographical distribution of BeltLine services and amenities. It should be noted, however, that it is unclear if these are ranked ordinally; if they are, equity sits second to lowest on the list of priorities (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2013).

The word choice of ABI’s typology closely parallels Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) discussed earlier, which provides a framework for determining the character of citizen participation, and how much power citizens have within each “rung” of the ladder. Incidentally, the terms “inform” and “consult” used by ABI fall under the “tokenism” category. “Engage” does not appear, though assessing the intent behind these activities against Arnstein’s definition of “placation” provides an interesting juxtaposition. Arnstein views participation that “placates” as allowing “have-nots to advise” on projects, while giving “powerholders the continued right to decide” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). The mission of the BeltLine’s “engagement” is for residents to “learn about the methodology” and “address any issues and foster ongoing support” of the BeltLine (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2013). The stated intent behind engagement opportunities is reminiscent of Arnstein’s “placation,” in that these meetings give citizens a channel to voice their concerns (“advise”) while BeltLine staff respond to them and redirect them into forward momentum for the project (“continued right to decide”).

The last document that must be mentioned is the 2013 Equitable Development Assessment (EDA), jointly produced by ABI and the Ford Foundation. The purpose of the EDA is to determine how the 2007 Equitable Development Plan (EDP) has been upheld or achieved, and to make recommendations according to what can be improved. Utilizing a framework of principles sourced from PolicyLink, an advocacy organization focused on equity in public policy, ABI organized the EDP around the following four principles, including “integration of people and place strategies, reduction of local and regional disparities, promotion of triple bottom line investments, and inclusion of meaningful community voice, participation, leadership, and ownership” (Atlanta BeltLine Partnership, 2013, p. 6). The EDA revealed that the BeltLine’s track record of expanding equity within its planning process is variable at best. Policies that push the envelope on affordable housing, job creation, and transportation are often qualified by statements that acknowledge that these policies have not been aggressively pursued or implemented. For example, the BeltLine Affordable Housing Trust Fund targets rental households between 30-60% AMI “when feasible;” however, the authors admit later that ABI had yet to build any affordable units after six years of operation, partially due to substantial developer resistance to affordable housing projects (Atlanta BeltLine Partnership, 2013, pp. 46, 54–55). In their conclusion, the ABI determines that equity must form of a part of it’s “core work” as opposed to “peripheral to the ‘real’ work” of trail construction, transit promotion, and

economic development (Atlanta BeltLine Partnership, 2013, p. 78). In other words, the final phrase charging the BeltLine with providing amenities and benefits “for all” people must be emphasized as much as the more material work (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2013, p. 6).

Through examinations of the Community Engagement Framework, the 2030 Strategic Implementation Plan, and 2013’s Equitable Development Assessment, it is clear that a mission to “expand equity” requires additional nuance to understand completely. These reports and visioning exercises suggest underlying debates about the meaning of equity, the Atlanta context for equity planning, the perceived purposes of large-scale redevelopment projects, and the position of redevelopment projects within larger governmental and institutional structures. I address these broad themes using these histories, planning documents, and interviews with key individuals who are impacted both positively and negatively by the BeltLine.

INSIGHTS FROM COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND ORGANIZATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

It became apparent quickly that sorting interviewees into categories of “organizational stakeholders” and “community members” ignored the nuanced ways in which these actors are connected to the Atlanta BeltLine and ABI’s community engagement efforts. Rather than a binary division between “organizational” and “community” actors, degrees of involvement can be mapped onto a spectrum, with “organizational” and “community” as opposite nodes. (Figure 6 depicts this spectrum.)

Some interviewees, primarily ABI staff, clearly belong farther towards “organizational” than others. With delegated power to implement the BeltLine project through Atlanta City Council, Invest Atlanta, and other municipal government agents, ABI staff operate on behalf of the organization and its interests, upholding the organization’s mission and values. Yet, as individual professionals in the planning field, they fall short of being “true” organizational stakeholders; according to Forester (1982), it is impossible for planners to divorce the personal from the professional when practicing planning that expands choice and communicates honestly with the public. Therefore, BeltLine staff bring part of their “community” or “residential” lives to the “organizational” side of the planning process, even if they do not intend to; this prevents them from serving the organization exclusively.

Other interviewees belong closer to “community” on the other end of the spectrum. These individuals include residents that operate outside of formal ABI engagement structures, such as committees or study groups. Instead, they put pressure on the BeltLine through campaigns, community association meetings, and public comment periods at quarterly briefings. Generally, their insight is seen as exterior, and sometimes adversarial. Yet, like “organizational” stakeholders, these residents fall short of being “only” community participants, given that they are involved in activities covered by ABI’s Community Engagement Framework, and sometimes take meetings with ABI staff to address their needs and vision for the BeltLine.

In the middle are several methods of participation that blur the distinction between “organizational” and “community.” Skewing closer to “organizational,” are current and former

board members of ABI, staff of the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership, stakeholders who were formerly employed by or in charge of ABI, and community members who have retained professional connections to BeltLine staff. In the middle are members of TADAC, BAHAB, Affordable Housing Task Force, Design Review Committee, and other advisory groups that serve as “watchdogs” for BeltLine operations. Skewing closer to “community” are leaders and general members of advocacy groups (including BeltLine Network, BeltLine Rail Now!, and Housing Justice League), as well as residents considered “veteran advocates” for the BeltLine’s completion. These are residents who, to quote one interviewee, “have such a different level of access” than the average citizen due to the sustained nature of their engagement. Their personal feelings about the BeltLine as an urban amenity tend to be optimistic rather than critical, though they are not always.

Through my interviews with people across this spectrum, several prevailing trends emerged. Interviewees touched on various subjects, including their engagement with the BeltLine over time, which community members are most listened to, and how the BeltLine can improve relations with the community. Below, I synthesize some of the prevailing themes that emerged from these interviews. (These are summarized in Table 2.)

Differing Definitions of Equity

One emergent theme regarding ABI’s community engagement efforts -- and their larger motivations for engagement -- is the different ways in which ABI staff, committee members, and residents define equity. This theme echoes Brand’s (2015) important research on how New Orleans communities have reacted to distribution of post-Katrina redevelopment efforts. In her case study, some neighborhood residents felt they were more deserving of the city’s redevelopment funds based on their contributions to society and ability to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps,” despite past support they had received from city government. Meanwhile, residents of other neighborhoods viewed a lack of investment in their neighborhood as part of larger historical patterns of municipal neglect. She extrapolates these interviews into differing conceptions of equity, with the former being defined by a return on investment and the latter being defined by repeated neglect and subjugation.

Though the BeltLine’s benefits are different in character—it is tasked with providing urban amenities, rather than direct funds—it is similarly finite in its geographical distribution to the neighborhoods Brand (2015) researched. Some community members understand this:

When you think of that 6500-acre TAD, it's either four or six percent of the city. Our City Council are ultimate overseers of the BeltLine through Invest Atlanta. And the City Council is responsible for the other 94 percent of the city. [12]

Several interviewees mentioned that ABI took special care to distribute its first construction projects across diverse geographical quadrants of Atlanta. This strategic diversity is also captured by ABI’s official timeline (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018e). Optics were one motivating factor behind this approach; ABI wanted to make good on its promise to be “for all”

living in neighborhoods affected by the project. Many interviewees, including ABI staff, also acknowledged that, like certain neighborhoods in Brand's study (2015), certain Atlanta neighborhoods have seen patterns of disinvestment and neglect.

You're dealing in a city, again, that's half black, half white. Neighborhoods like mine that I live in are dealing with, you know, no internet infiltration, poverty, unemployment. How do you encourage people that don't have the bandwidth literally physically--literally or figuratively--to be involved and engaged? [12]

We're talking roughly a fifth of the landmass of the City of Atlanta, a fifth of the population of the City of Atlanta, 45 up to 70 neighborhoods depending on how you want to count them, in some of the most and least affluent areas of the city, a wide spectrum of demographics, long-time homeowners, renters that were more vulnerable--in multiple cases even on the Eastside. [16]

We were doing something in every quadrant of the Atlanta BeltLine all of the time. So it could be master planning, it could be design, it could be construction, it could be opening. It could be the economic development that was happening alongside of what we were doing. So we tried to assure the community that we weren't working on just one piece at a time. Because it did become an, "Okay, see, they're doing it again. They're only working on the Eastside, and we on the Westside will never see the same kind of implementation of infrastructure over here." And then we did the Westside Trail. [15]

Extending the BeltLine through these neighborhoods is seen by ABI staff as a potential solution for this geographical inequity. By offering urban amenities, building connectivity through transit, and serving as a catalyst for economic growth, the BeltLine trail can—according to ABI and BeltLine supporters—help correct patterns of disinvestment in neglected neighborhoods, particularly on Atlanta's Westside and Southside. Restricting access to these communities is seen as a form of inequity.

This definition of *equity as geographical* was most commonly discussed by those closer to the "organizational" end of the spectrum (Figure 6). Equity as rooted in geography has been explored by planning scholars extensively (Brand, 2015; Massey, 1990; Powell, 1999). In Atlanta, this conception of equity has merit, given the city's history of segregation that continues to manifest geographically today (Cable, 2013). However, as with many cities in the American South, geography alone does not fully explain why certain Atlanta neighborhoods experience patterns of disinvestment while others flourish. Rather, geographical inequity is inextricably linked to racial and class-based discrimination (Massey, 1990).

In interviews, this definition of *equity as racial or class-based* surfaced when discussing consequences of the BeltLine's wide geographical footprint. Several interviewees, many of which fall closer to the "community" half of the interviewee spectrum, noted the BeltLine's mission to invest in greenspace and transit in distressed neighborhoods as welcome improvements, but expressed concern about who would actually benefit from these amenities.

One interviewee in particular was wary about the potential for new development projects that have sprouted alongside other sections of the trail:

We're not going to make the mistake that we made on the Eastside of what we did, nor on the Westside...we think that it's important and imperative that they have something in place ahead of time before you start trying to do the development, before these outside investor groups start buying up everything close to the BeltLine itself. [I7]

So what you're doing is just continue pushing poor people to a spot where they can't go no more. But you got to get ways and means of creating jobs and opportunities. So I think that's where the BeltLine can maybe change some of its mission, in terms of looking at jobs, economic development type stuff. [I7]

Other interviewees are more dubious about the BeltLine's objectives, stating that the TAD funding model inherently disadvantages poor residents due to its reliance on rising property tax values:

The only thing that they really can try to do is try to facilitate the property value around the BeltLine going up. That's the only way they can really increase their funding at this point. What needs to happen for the BeltLine to be successful in a way that benefits the spectrum of who Atlanta is, [which is] everybody? [I4]

It should be noted that this is contested by ABI staff and other community members involved with the project because the TAD has “drawn out” single-family homes. However, it is true that home and property tax values in areas outside the BeltLine TAD have risen sharply since it was drawn (Immergluck, 2009; Immergluck & Balan, 2018).

In terms of the community engagement process itself, some interviewees have remarked that in recent years, ABI staff have made more frequent and more earnest attempts to address the concerns and fears of community members, especially in relation to its program to provide affordable housing in distressed communities. Currently in the process of updating the project's Sub-Area Master Plans, ABI staff have slowed down the community engagement process to more methodically and carefully interact with minority and low-income residents who are worried about displacement and gentrification in their neighborhoods.⁵ At the same time, these residents will continue putting pressure on the BeltLine to honor its goals as they pertain to minority and economically disadvantaged residents:

I think it's best for me to be more of an outside somebody. Be on the end and try to be a good listener and participate from that angle, but also try to get more people engaged and be a part of it. And not being a role on one of the BeltLine boards or subgroups or whatever they try to do, but just someone that can be more of a help to them to get more people involved. Because I

⁵ One interviewee urged planners to “just listen, listen, listen” [I6].

don't want to be a quiet mouthpiece. I want to be a continually engaged mouthpiece with what's happening with the BeltLine. [I7]

Another less common conception of *equity as awareness of the BeltLine* arose from interviews. In some ways, this conception of equity is related to equity being geographical, since the likelihood of someone being aware of the BeltLine could potentially correlate to how close they live to the trail. However, interviewees have commented that some people who live in close proximity to the BeltLine corridor still are not aware of its benefits, its drawbacks, or even its existence (particularly on the Westside Trail). Thus, ABI staff are concerned that their engagement strategies are missing significant portions of Atlanta's population:

We know that all the time meetings are not the perfect platform for people to get involved. People have lives. We understand that. [I5]

It's easy to think that everybody knows what the BeltLine is in town. But they don't...There's people who live in BeltLine neighborhoods that have never heard of the project. [I6]

As such, ABI staff hope to address equity as awareness suitably through more creative and expansive community engagement efforts.

Perceptions of the BeltLine's Purpose

Along with differing definitions of equity, interviewees also expressed differing perceptions of the BeltLine's main purpose, mission, and goals. Interviewees recognize the multifaceted or comprehensive nature of the BeltLine but tend to focus on one or two components of the BeltLine's work that they see as most important, most exciting, or most threatening. Some individuals emphasized transit and smarter urban development, while others emphasized affordable housing and economic opportunity.

These differing perceptions are remarkable for a few reasons. First, there is no want for information about the BeltLine's stated purpose, mission, and goals. ABI's stated mission appears in every promotional campaign, social media site, and news article about the BeltLine, even those that are critical of it. Secondly, regardless of the effectiveness of their engagement strategies, ABI community engagement staff have repeatedly spoken to community leaders in every sub-area, as well as every city council district, including the only one that does not have a piece of the trail within its boundaries (personal communication, I5). Ostensibly, this means they have communicated their mission to leaders in at least these areas. Lastly, to a degree, every interviewee is right! The BeltLine has claimed responsibility for improvements to trail creation, parks and greenspace, transit and connectivity, new economic opportunities, aesthetic improvements, arts and cultural events, and affordable housing development.

Of course, people know, at least vaguely, what the BeltLine's mission is; they simply prioritize certain aspects of the BeltLine over others. Those situated between the middle of the spectrum and the "organizational" pole tend to envision the BeltLine as a catalyst for large-scale

urban transformation within the BeltLine corridor. Many of these interviewees refer to the idea of the BeltLine as a “dream” or a “transformational tool” for Atlanta (personal communication, I3). Sometimes, they also acknowledge that they reduce it to its component parts, but others see its potential:

You know, I see it as job producing, affordable housing, greenspace, and all of the other core elements...[but it's] a life-changing or lifestyle change for these young kids that folk who are my daughter's age didn't have that opportunity to be able to get out and walk and congregate with their friends in a place like the Atlanta BeltLine. [I5]

Others, often community members, suggested that some of these theme areas are more urgent than others. They are skeptical of the intentions of ABI and the governmental actors overseeing it, especially regarding affordable housing and attentiveness to poorer residents:

It ain't about no upscaled development. It ain't about this beautification thing. It ain't about this park and greenspace. It's about people, more than just the greenspace or walking trail or that sort of stuff. We need to start talking about the people that have been impacted by the development of the BeltLine. [I7]

I think all the critics would probably agree that having walkability is a good thing, and connecting neighborhoods through walk paths and a transit system is a good thing. That the less we're forcing people to commute everywhere, it's not good for us in so many different ways, the environment. That being said, I think the criticism wasn't--it didn't have anything to do with the good-natured motivation behind the BeltLine. The criticism was that if this isn't done right, it'll be a great engine for gentrification. And the BeltLine advocates actually had to be fought to get the little affordable housing piece that's in there. [I4]

The main difference between these two orientations is not that one focuses on affordable housing and the other focuses on comprehensive planning and new urbanism. It is that the former perspective focuses on the future end product, while the latter emphasizes the current problem. When affected by complicated issues, such as a lack of affordable housing options, it is difficult to zoom out and prioritize a broader, utopian vision if urgent concerns are not being addressed.

This point of confusion speaks to ABI's community engagement framework directly: how can an organization engage residents in its planning process if organizational stakeholders and community members are speaking different languages? If community members have different conceptions of what or who the project is for, how can an organization build consensus or use dissensus (a la Anderson et al., 2016) as leverage to reach agreeable conclusions? Some have argued that this task is difficult: “I would say that as someone who has practiced a lot of community engagement, it's very difficult to have everyone's voice well-represented in every project” (personal communication, I1).

Regardless of its feasibility, the different perceptions about which aspect of the BeltLine's mission is most important has the potential to render many community engagement

activities fruitless. These differences also create another divide between citizens who are *on-board* with the BeltLine's vision, and those who are *not-on-board*. On-board citizens, regardless of where they fall on the organizational-community spectrum, can influence the BeltLine to address their concerns as long as those concerns fit within the utopian vision and comprehensive purpose the BeltLine has adopted. Not-on-board citizens, on the other hand, put stress on the BeltLine from the outside about individual issues, eschewing the BeltLine's greater vision in the process. Even if not-on-board citizens are engaged through ABI's community engagement framework, their feedback may not be considered to the same degree as feedback from an on-board citizen. As one interviewee put it when asked who is listened to most, "I almost don't count. I just have such a different layer of access" (personal communication, I2).

Lack of Creativity in Community Engagement

Regarding the quality of ABI's community engagement techniques, several interviewees noted that engagement activities historically have lacked creativity. This characterization refers both to the content of ABI's community engagement efforts and their method of information dissemination. "Creativity," a somewhat vague term, in this case could incorporate methods based in communicative planning, critical pragmatism, and reciprocity of stories as planning tools (Forester, 1999; Sanoff, 2000). Based on feedback from interviewees, creative methods consider the experience of the community member over the convenience of planners.

According to one interviewee, ABI community engagement began with preliminary meetings where feedback was not solicited in earnest. ABI staff arrived to the meeting with trail designs already underway, with only a few negotiable items. The main purpose of the meeting was to get the community's approval, as opposed to their ideas.

So a couple of things happened specifically where we didn't have input. So when the Eastside Trail was getting designed, we were told, "It's private money. We have to move forward. There's not a whole lot of time. We're going to design it, tell you about it, and we don't really care what you have to say." I mean, that's what we were told at a meeting. "We don't really care what you have to say, because we have to get this done. And we're glad you're here for this meeting, but we're not interested in your feedback." And then on the Westside, the same [thing] happened! We go to a meeting, and the design is at like 30 or 40 percent, and they were like, "Hey, we just got funding. We have, like, three months to get this whole thing in, and we don't have a whole lot of time. And we've gotten feedback in the past. And you can look at these maps today, and you've got 10 minutes to write down comments, and then we gotta go." And that was the engagement for the design of the Westside Trail. So, Eastside Trail, Westside Trail, nightmare on the engagement front. Really frustrating. [I2]

It is unclear if these meetings are the same as those the BeltLine states were attended by over 600 people (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018e). Meetings became more collaborative as the BeltLine Network began to assert the importance of community member feedback to trail design and access. However, one interviewee noted that BeltLine Network also did not include all

voices from the community:

So the BeltLine Rail Now problem is that it's all white, mostly Eastside folks. So there's no diversity on it, and that's problematic. Not that the Network was any different, but we're very aware that that's a problem, whereas Network might not have been very aware that that's a problem. [12]

Over time, ABI expanded opportunities for community engagement through creating committees, study groups, and visiting existing administrative organizations like community groups and neighborhood planning units (NPU). Additional forms of engagement have traversed new mediums as well, including Facebook Live, informational videos, presence at arts festivals, and physical bus tours to the Eastside and Westside Trails.

While these were all welcome improvements, some community members still believe that people are being left out, particularly people without access to the Internet and those who do not have time to attend various community meetings. One interviewee suggested alternative forms of engagement and publicity:

You've got so many people that's not a part of the social media efforts that's going on here, maybe they need to know really employ people--maybe we ought to even hire some folks--but to put door hangers on people's doorknobs about upcoming meetings that's in these areas. Or about how people can dialogue with them. Because if they know something, they just can't send it out to their quota or their lists of what they call "community leaders," or their email lists they got like that. That don't get the word out to people. So they really need to employ, organize the people on the street, to come out and put door hangers on there, or even have barbershop or corner-store discussions. That's what I'm saying. We need to do a little bit differently than what they've been doing. So thinking outside the box. [17]

This individual reinforces what others have said many times over: community engagement that expands opportunity to participate is difficult, time consuming, and resource intensive. Knocking on doors, pinning flyers to mailboxes, and taking the time to set up automated calls are also not guaranteed methods of reaching people. However, varied forms of information dissemination increase the likelihood that residents receive that news and information. Ultimately, community members want to partner with organizations like ABI to get people to meetings where residents can interact with organizational leaders. By designing engagement mediums and techniques for the “end user”—in this case, residents that are normally neglected—ABI’s community engagement can work towards designing equitable engagement methods.

Knowledge of Development Process: Timing, Funding, Advocacy

During the one quarterly briefing I attended, but also in subsequent meetings, ABI staff kept repeating one refrain: “We are not an advocacy organization, we are an implementation agency.” This was usually stated in response to concerns from citizen and advocacy groups about

things within the BeltLine mission that are currently absent from the BeltLine planning area, including transit and affordable housing. While the statement is true, it is often seen as a frustrating excuse by organizational stakeholders and community members across the spectrum, including former ABI staff.

The repetition of this refrain, in addition to comments from interviewees, provides insight into another emergent theme. For feedback to have a tangible impact on projects like the BeltLine, community members must have knowledge of how the development process works. The development process is complex, with many moving parts, actors, institutions, and timelines, who all possess varying degrees of power. The BeltLine alone is supported by over ten agencies alone, including ABI, ABP, Invest Atlanta, the Atlanta City Council, Atlanta Public Schools, the Fulton County Board of Commissioners, and private funders. In this institutional puzzle, ABI does indeed serve as the implementation agency for the BeltLine project, but they are also responsible for community engagement, which in theory is supposed to inform how the project takes shape. So how can citizens give feedback so that it effectively impacts the final product?

Appropriate timing. Some interviewees indicated that it is vital to know when to give feedback on a project, with many stating that the most vital time is during the idea phase:

You can be upset, but if you're not knowing where to be, what point to be upset, or where...your voice could be better heard. A lot of it so idea-phase, or like I said, the end-result phase [I1].

Others indicate that it is simply too late to change fundamental aspects of the trail beyond aesthetic considerations:

At some point in the next five to 10 years, we don't need to have a BeltLine group, [ABP] or [ABI] any more, because we're done. We've done all the work. If money comes in, then we hand the plans to somebody to build the damn thing, but we're not doing the outreach. We're done. [I2]

These quotes come from interviewees in the middle of the spectrum who are familiar with the typical arc of planning projects, but who are not in formal positions of power. Community members on the other hand, who may be more familiar with repercussions of development projects, insist that there is more to be done, particularly regarding economic opportunity:

Or looking at those, who's going to create a job opportunity for those that are going to maintain the BeltLine, and that sort of stuff. But making sure that there's a concerted effort to hire people from within the neighborhoods that's in the BeltLine community. Even when they start looking at the park and greenspace, how do you have people that maintain those jobs, maintain those parks, stuff like that. [I7]

Appropriate leaders. ABI staff stress they can only fix or mitigate issues that are within their geographical and organizational purview:

You can take any one of these issues. You look at transit in southwest Atlanta or the Westside. Some people would say it would not be equitable to not build transit in those communities. Other people might say that transit, just like bike lanes, are a gentrification tool or mechanism. And the reality is that it's neither one or the other in entirety. It's very complex, and it has--there's a lot of overarching things that are well beyond our organization's control from a city policy standpoint, or even from a state standpoint. [I6]

This sheds light on the “implementation agency” refrain. ABI staff serve as one node in a nuanced network of political actors working toward achieving ABI’s mission, and their power to “advocate” for certain improvements or policies is limited by others’ permission, including the Atlanta City Council and their Board of Directors. It should be noted that the BeltLine does have policies unique to its planning area enacted through an overlay district, a special zoning category that allows for differences on top of existing zoning codes. These differences include housing policy in the form of inclusionary zoning, design policy in the form of setbacks, and other considerations consistent with good urbanism (City of Atlanta, n.d.).

In order for community feedback to be effective, it needs to go through the right channels, including committees and community engagement meetings organized by ABI, but also to elected officials who ultimately have more power to dictate citywide policies that can slow down gentrification.

Not that I'm defending the BeltLine for it's great work on affordable housing, but they're responsible for 6500 acres and they're responsible for 15 percent of their TAD increment going towards affordable housing. They're not responsible for building housing. They're not responsible for stabilizing neighborhoods that are going through gentrification. They're responsible for building out the BeltLine. And the frustration and the anger, the misdirection of all of that energy towards them instead of City Hall and City Council and the Mayor's Office is misguided on our parts, but it's also been misdirected by the City, City Council, and the Mayor's Office. [I2]

Yet, this cannot be the only barrier to equitable community engagement, given that many community members *already have* relationships with their elected officials (personal communication, I7).

Appropriate dialogue. Many interviewees yearned for more transparent and honest dialogue between ABI staff and residents. Community leaders scolded the BeltLine for a lack of transparency about what community feedback will actually accomplish:

The BeltLine could probably do a better job of explaining to the public what their input has--. If you have a meeting, and you ask people for questions or ask people for feedback, like, “We're at this point in the process, and this is what your feedback can do and can't do. And so we're either asking for feedback to get your opinion so that we know, or we're asking for your feedback because that's actually going to be able to influence where we're at.” [I2]

So it's a bit of smoke and mirrors, but it's like intentional smoke and mirrors. It's like, "There's the bad guy! And we're going to try to fix them." Instead of, like, "We're the bad guy. They're our monster. We're not fixing it." [I2]

Meanwhile, ABI staff lamented that community members simply do not want to understand challenges they face, from funding losses to construction delays and lawsuits:

Almost every affordable housing producer in the City of Atlanta went bankrupt during that recession, so there were no people out there doing affordable housing. There's a story. Have we done enough in terms of affordable housing? Absolutely not. But is there a reason that we have not? Absolutely there is. And sometimes people don't want to hear that, but it is a fact that we have to deal with every day. [I5]

Efforts should be made to increase transparent dialogue between both parties. However, it must be emphasized that to accomplish this without falling into manipulation, therapy, or tokenism (Arnstein, 1969), ABI—as the power-holder in these exchanges—would have to design strategies that avoid cooptation of community members or their expectations.

Funding conditions. Last, but certainly not least, interviewees cite the character of funding as a barrier to equitable community engagement. Some of ABI's first funds, according to one interviewee, sped up the timeline of the initial trail design, resulting in meetings mentioned above that sought community approval rather than feedback. Later funds came from federal grants, and legally required ABI to adopt a slower timeline with heavy community engagement components. Knowing how a project is funded could provide insight to community members about how much community engagement to expect for any given project, which could influence how community members put pressure on the project to hear their demands and desires.

Leadership

One final theme emerging from interviews regarding the evolution of community engagement is the role of leadership in setting a tone for interactions with residents. The BeltLine has had five CEOs, with the role currently filled by a sixth on an interim basis. Additionally, other thought leaders regarding the BeltLine have left the organization over conflicts of values, famously including founder Gravel, who was on the Board of Directors when he announced his departure (Stafford & Mariano, 2017).

Many interviewees noted that different CEOs brought different strengths and styles of leadership (personal communication, I2, I4). The starkest difference came between Paul Morris and Brian McGowan, who left earlier this year (Keenan, 2018a). While it is clear that the leadership approach to community engagement increased opportunities for equitable engagement of residents, this does not always translate into action. One interviewee went on to note that even though McGowan increased opportunities for engagement and improved the culture at ABI, it has had little impact on the trail and planning area:

Have they made improvements on engagement and demonstrating that affordable housing is more important than under Paul Morris? Yes. I will absolutely give them that. I have not gotten to know this new person. I thought Brian was an improvement. Brian was somebody I could get lunch with and talk out things with. So, yeah, there's been improvements. But where we want to see improvement is not in the culture of BeltLine Inc. We want to see improvement on the actual BeltLine, and that we have not seen. [I4]

Conversely, ABI staff do not believe that changes in leadership have resulted in better or more equitable community engagement techniques, due to the strength of the community engagement framework itself:

One of the benefits we have is that we're grounded in this framework. We're legislatively mandated to have these steadfast mechanisms, and then we get to build on top of that and adjust to the changing environment of the changes in the project. I've seen how...when we've deviated from that process, how it's bit us. And I think that the leadership in this department has made a big difference in not allowing changes in upper level leadership to completely reinvent community engagement every couple years. [I6]

In conclusion, it appears that leadership does have some impact on how ABI staff approach the *value* of community engagement and the feedback acquired from residents. How much it impacts community engagement techniques or the final product is up for debate.

WHAT IS THE BELTLINE'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DIAGNOSIS?

It is clear, both from these interviews, news articles, and reactions to public engagement activities, that the BeltLine's community engagement activities and values have evolved from their inception to now, ten years later. Deliberate attempts to obstruct or limit the amount of citizen inclusion have given way to more thoughtful techniques, a more comprehensive structure, and increased effort. Internal and external pressure to institute organizational change has resulted in a community engagement framework that attempts to reach residents across geographical, racial, and class-based disparities. Several questions remain on their effectiveness. Here I apply lessons from the BeltLine's difficult history with community engagement to theoretical constructs discussed earlier, including from Forester, Brand, and Ghose.

Intent vs. impact. First, the BeltLine could benefit greatly from heeding Forester's wisdom on understanding the difference between intent to expand equity within planning processes and the impact of having done so, either successfully or unsuccessfully. Forester (1982) discusses the need for planners to drop presumptions of impartiality and to reach beyond structures that simply ask for feedback. Similarly, planners should not assume that asking questions will elicit honest or easy responses from community members. More creative methods are necessary.

Planners should also understand the difference between how community residents define equity, heeding important lessons from Brand (2015). Residents from Peoplestown and other

Southside neighborhoods will likely define equity differently from those in more privileged Northside neighborhoods. Lacking this cultural competency on how to co-produce planning solutions with community members (Quick & Feldman, 2011) will more often than not lead to misunderstandings, distrust, and inequitable results.

One concrete change that ABI staff can make is to shift their scope when talking about bringing benefits to disadvantaged areas of Atlanta. There is often a stark mismatch between the benefits the BeltLine will bring to a *neighborhood* versus the *people* who already live there. By their very nature, neighborhoods are tethered physically to their geography. They can withstand change to their form, character, and identity. Meanwhile, the people who live in a neighborhood are more transient, even if they choose to remain. They are beholden to the changing form, character, and identity of a neighborhood, in the form of property taxes, resident mix, and resource availability. To truly fulfill its mission of providing “sustainable city life” and “public spaces for all,” special attention must be paid to ensure the amenities created by the BeltLine are accessible by people who already live in the BeltLine’s host communities (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018b). Connecting people in reality must take precedence over connecting neighborhoods in the abstract.

Citizen roles within the collaborative governance structure. Ghose (2015) and Roy (2015) discuss how planning efforts that possess a collaborative governance structure limit true citizen power, both by drowning citizen feedback within an ocean of institutions and misleading citizens to believe they have sway over the institutions in which they participate. ABI is the product of many institutions that oversee, inform, and direct its work. It could be argued that even ABI staff are not agents in and of themselves, but rather responsive to actors at higher levels of power, such as the city council.

Instead of bringing citizens *into* ABI’s community engagement framework, community planners should instead take themselves *outside of* the framework. Instead of acquiring feedback, they should listen to stories from community members and share stories of their own. This would prevent information from automatically being rendered as useful or not useful, and would instead focus on stories’ reciprocal nature to inform how urban spaces are produced, reproduced, and co-produced (Forester, 1999; Quick & Feldman, 2011). Residents already have ideas about how they would like to construct their neighborhoods; finding adaptive ways to integrate these ideas within larger projects is necessary for preserving neighborhood character and expanding equity. Logistically, this will be difficult, considering Ghose’s assertion that neoliberal ideology constrains the tools available to planners. Recent trends, such as place-making, tactical urbanism, and public art takeovers, could lead to more comprehensive redefinitions of what equitable community engagement methods look like.

Is it too late? Many individuals involved with the BeltLine believe that the process of community engagement regarding what the BeltLine looks like is done, while others believe much is left to do in the area of affordable housing and economic development policy. Certainly community engagement efforts can still address these areas; however, they must take a different form if they are to promote equitable development, particularly in Southside neighborhoods.

Quick & Feldman (2011) hold that urban spaces are constantly reproduced by environmental, cultural, and interpersonal forces at play. If urban spaces, which are often considered static and physically permanent, can be flexible in this way, then it follows that community engagement processes can also continue in this fashion. Policies that impact neighborhoods' built form, equitable economic development, and affordability must be revisited and reaffirmed after their initial passage. Designed spaces will change character and must continue to be discussed. This orientation is at odds with the permanent nature of the built environment, yet even this changes over time, as does the community's relationship with it.

The broader question is, will community engagement take on this radical and equitable character? Early diagnoses are discouraging. First, change takes time. ABI's community engagement process has improved over time, but not before it fundamentally altered the urban fabric of Eastside neighborhoods (Housing Justice League & Research|Action Cooperative, 2017; Immergluck & Balan, 2018). To account for this lengthy timeline, ABI staff can make the case that pursuing true equitable development requires thoughtful planning, analysis, and interaction with residents, none of which can be rushed.

Second, change takes funding. Finishing the BeltLine requires the BeltLine to make monetary sense. As such, the BeltLine's return on investment quotient will continue to be of primary concern to the actors involved in its design and implementation. This supports Roy's argument that neoliberal planning projects must make the case for themselves, in the process prioritizing economic growth models that maximize profit. ABI community engagement efforts could resist this trend, arguing that expanding the metaphorical pie for all citizens ultimately benefits the rest of the city as well. Additionally, as stated in its mission, the BeltLine brings non-monetary benefits to neighborhoods, which typically are not factored into the standard calculation for return on investment. Designing equitable measures of engagement could be a good starting point for emphasizing these benefits and uniting residents within and across communities.

Third, change takes political will. While ABI has proven that the character, scope, and intent of their community engagement framework will change, it comprises only one organization within a larger coalition of institutions that all dictate the project's future. Many of these are products of municipal and state government agencies, which have concerns beyond the preservation of neighborhood character—namely, economic growth and capital accumulation. Additionally, representatives of these bodies are sometimes appointed rather than elected, so even representational citizen power has no bearing on their makeup. The mixture of these agencies in relation to one planning project pushes them all forward while diluting the power of any single one. The BeltLine reached “critical mass” a long time ago, and slowing it down will be difficult.

It is clear, however, that citizens are serving as the squeakiest of wheels. Efforts to resist have forced the hands of many quasigovernmental actors, requiring them to slow down for various exercises that analyze equity issues pertaining to the Atlanta BeltLine. I want to make it clear that the purpose of this report is not to lambast the Atlanta BeltLine for not doing enough,

but rather to explain the reasons why it cannot do more, due to its position within a larger economic system following neoliberal ideologies of growth and progress. Citizens looking to affect change must turn to more insurgent methods of urban planning. They must find allies who occupied former positions of power but have departed over conflicts of values. They must exercise their rights to representation, petition, and protest. They must continue to put pressure on city leaders and members of these quasigovernmental agencies while also reclaiming power for marginalized populations. Our city leaders would do well to listen.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, M. B., Hall, D. M., McEvoy, J., Gilbertz, S. J., Ward, L., & Rode, A. (2016). Defending dissensus: participatory governance and the politics of water measurement in Montana's Yellowstone River Basin. *Environmental Politics*, 25(6), 991–1012. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2016.1189237>
- Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A Ladder Of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>
- Atlanta BeltLine Inc. (2013). *Atlanta BeltLine 2030 strategic implementation plan*. Retrieved from https://beltlineorg-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Beltline_Implementation-Plan_web.pdf
- Atlanta BeltLine Inc. (2018a). About Atlanta BeltLine Inc.: Board of Directors. Retrieved November 7, 2018, from <https://beltline.org/about/atlanta-beltline-inc/#board-of-directors>
- Atlanta BeltLine Inc. (2018b). Atlanta BeltLine Overview: The Atlanta BeltLine in 5. Retrieved November 7, 2018, from <https://beltline.org/about/the-atlanta-beltline-project/atlanta-beltline-overview/>
- Atlanta BeltLine Inc. (2018c). Atlanta BeltLine Partnership. Retrieved November 7, 2018, from <https://beltline.org/about/atlanta-beltline-partnership/>
- Atlanta BeltLine Inc. (2018d). Community Engagement. Retrieved November 7, 2018, from <https://beltline.org/progress/progress/community-engagement/>
- Atlanta BeltLine Inc. (2018e). Project History. Retrieved November 7, 2018, from <https://beltline.org/progress/progress/project-history/>
- Atlanta BeltLine Partnership. (2013). *An Atlanta BeltLine for all: Equitable development assessment*. Atlanta.
- Benner, C., & Pastor, M. (2015). Collaboration, Conflict, and Community Building at the Regional Scale: Implications for Advocacy Planning. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 35(3), 307–322. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X15580024>
- Bluestein, G. (2012, October 24). Atlanta BeltLine; 2nd top BeltLine executive resigns. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, p. 1B.
- Botchwey, N., Johnson, N., O'Connell, L. K., & Kim, A. J. (2019, forthcoming). Including Youth in the Ladder of Citizen Participation: Adding Rungs of Consent, Advocacy, and Incorporation. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, special issue.
- Brand, A. L. (2015). The Politics of Defining and Building Equity in the Twenty-First Century. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 35(3), 249–264. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X15585001>
- Cable, D. (2013). The racial dot map: one dot per person for the entire U.S. Retrieved November 16, 2018, from <https://demographics.virginia.edu/DotMap/index.html>
- City of Atlanta. (n.d.). The Atlanta BeltLine. Retrieved November 16, 2018, from <https://www.atlantaga.gov/government/departments/city-planning/office-of-zoning-development/the-atlanta-beltline>
- Davidoff, P. (1965). Advocacy and pluralism in Planning. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 31(4), 331–338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366508978187>
- Dobbins, M. (2018, February). Overcoming the affordable housing funding challenge. *SaportaReport*. Retrieved from <https://saportareport.com/overcoming-affordable-housing-funding-challenge/>
- Donsky, P. (2007, December 27). Funding lawsuit ties up Beltline. *The Atlanta Journal and*

- Constitution*, p. 6D.
- Donsky, P. (2008a, April 13). Advisers criticize Beltline outreach efforts; Project overseers failed to get public involved, citizen committee says in letter. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, p. 10ZH.
- Donsky, P. (2008b, July 9). Unequal spending likely for Beltline; \$45 million due: Third of bond issue needed to pay off loan or project will lose Masons' land, earnest money. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, p. 5J.
- Ellen, I. G., & Weselcouch, M. (2015). *Housing, Neighborhoods, and Opportunity: The Location of New York City's Subsidized Affordable Housing*. New York. Retrieved from http://furmancenter.org/files/NYUFurmanCenter_HousingNeighborhoodsOpp_Jan2015.pdf
- Elwood, S. (2005). Perspectives on Participation, Urban Research, and the Transformation of "Local" Urban Geographies. *Urban Geography*, 26(3), 261–265. <https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.26.3.261>
- Fausset, R. (2016, September 12). Atlanta's Path to Rebirth Starts With a Sidewalk. *The New York Times*, p. A1. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/12/us/atlanta-beltline.html>
- Forester, J. (1982). Planning in the face of power. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 48(1), 67–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944368208976167>
- Forester, J. (1999). Listen to stories, learn in practice: the priority of practical judgment. In *The deliberative practitioner: Encouraging participatory planning processes* (pp. 19–38). Boston: MIT Press.
- Forester, J. (2013). On the theory and practice of critical pragmatism: Deliberative practice and creative negotiations. *Planning Theory*, 12(1), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095212448750>
- Garvin, A. (2004). *The Beltline emerald necklace: Atlanta's new public realm*. Atlanta. Retrieved from <https://beltlineorg-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Emerald-Necklace-Study.pdf>
- Ghose, R. (2005). The complexities of citizen participation through collaborative governance. *Space and Polity*, 9(1), 61–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562570500078733>
- Goldman, D. (Photographer). (2017, May 30). *Portions of the Atlanta BeltLine have now opened, but the \$4.8 billion project still faces a long road ahead*. [Digital image.] Retrieved from <https://www.citylab.com/design/2017/05/atlantas-beltline-still-has-a-long-way-to-go/528354/>
- Gravel, R. A. (1999). *Belt Line Atlanta: Design of infrastructure as a reflection of public policy*. Retrieved from <https://smartech.gatech.edu/handle/1853/7400>
- Greco, H. (2017, January 18). Concerns remain, even as City Council backs ABI's new affordable housing efforts. *Georgia State University Wire*, p. 1. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1859532047?accountid=11107>
- Green, J. (2018, October 3). How Pittsburgh Yards is pioneering community-led Beltline development. *Curbed Atlanta*, pp. 1–9. Retrieved from <https://atlanta.curbed.com/atlanta-development/2018/10/3/17903346/pittsburgh-yards-beltline-development-community>
- Healey, P. (1992). Planning through debate: The communicative turn in planning theory. *Town Planning Review*, 63(2), 143–162.
- Housing Justice League, & Research|Action Cooperative. (2017). *Beltlining: Gentrification, Broken Promises, and Hope on Atlanta's Southside*. Atlanta.
- Immergluck, D. (2009). Large redevelopment initiatives, housing values and gentrification: The

- case of the Atlanta Beltline. *Urban Studies*, 46(8), 1723–1745.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098009105500>
- Immergluck, D., & Balan, T. (2018). Sustainable for whom? Green urban development, environmental gentrification, and the Atlanta Beltline. *Urban Geography*, 39(4), 546–562.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2017.1360041>
- Innes, J. E., & Booher, D. E. (2004). Reframing public participation: Strategies for the 21st century. *Planning Theory and Practice*, 5(4), 419–436.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1464935042000293170>
- Keenan, S. (2018a, July 6). Beltline CEO reportedly leaving post for Seattle job. Who should replace him? *Curbed Atlanta*. Retrieved from
<https://atlanta.curbed.com/2018/7/6/17539842/beltline-ceo-marta-transit-seattle-brian-mcgowan>
- Keenan, S. (2018b, September 27). Amid skepticism, Atlanta mayor vying to “Green-light The Gulch” project. *Curbed Atlanta*, pp. 9–12. Retrieved from
<https://atlanta.curbed.com/2018/9/27/17909320/atlanta-mayor-bottoms-green-light-gulch-project-downtown-cim>
- Kempner, M. (2016, October 9). DEVELOPMENT; House hunting along the Beltline’s frontier. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, p. 1D.
- Krumholz, N. (1982). A retrospective view of equity planning: Cleveland 1969–1979. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 48(2), 163–174.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01944368208976535>
- Leslie, K. (2013, December 12). ATLANTA BELTLINE; Beltline issues: timing, funding. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, p. 1B.
- Leslie, K. (2014, July 5). Inside the battle over the Beltline debt to APS. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, pp. 1–9. Retrieved from <https://www.myajc.com/news/inside-the-battle-over-the-beltline-debt-aps/eD0KyBMBiler8Iy9sdLjWK/>
- Mariano, W., Conway, L., & Ondieki, A. (2017, July 13). How the Atlanta Beltline broke its promise on affordable housing. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. Retrieved from <https://www.myajc.com/news/local/how-the-atlanta-beltline-broke-its-promise-affordable-housing/0VXnu1BIYC0IbA9U4u2CEM/>
- Massey, D. S. (1990). American Apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass. *American Journal of Sociology*, 96(2), 329–357.
- McWhirter, C. (2007, September 16). Beltline property taxes afire. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, p. 1C.
- Miller, P. (2017, September 28). BeltLine to host Westside Trail ribbon cutting, community celebration. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, pp. 1–2. Retrieved from <https://www.ajc.com/news/local/beltline-host-westside-trail-ribbon-cutting-community-celebration/AhtyqYHIbrISy3SuHJE3CP/>
- Pendered, D. (2005, November 13). Next for Beltline: Fill in the blanks; Some leery as details of project remain unclear. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, p. 5E. Retrieved from <https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/2b7728d6-50c3-46a3-ba66-76d03190239d/?context=1516831>
- Pendered, D. (2006a, February 27). Funding the Beltline. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, p. 5D.
- Pendered, D. (2006b, September 23). Beltline broken? How a key piece of one of the most promising development deals in recent Atlanta history fell apart. Can this relationship be

- saved? And what if it can't? *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, p. 1A.
- Piketty, T., Saez, E., & Zucman, G. (2018). Distributional national accounts: methods and estimates for the United States. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 133(2), 553–609. Retrieved from <http://gabriel-zucman.eu/files/PSZ2018QJE.pdf>
- Ponczek, S., & Lu, W. (2016, October 5). The 10 most unequal cities in America. *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-10-05/miami-is-the-newly-crowned-most-unequal-city-in-the-u-s>
- Powell, J. (1999). Race, poverty, and urban sprawl: Access to opportunities through regional strategies. *Forum for Social Economics*, 28(2), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02833980>
- Quick, K. S., & Feldman, M. S. (2011). Distinguishing participation and inclusion. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 31(3), 272–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X11410979>
- Roy, P. (2015). Collaborative planning - A neoliberal strategy? A study of the Atlanta BeltLine. *Cities*, 43, 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2014.11.010>
- Sanoff, H. (2000). Participation methods. In *Community participation methods in design and planning* (pp. 37–103). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Saval, N. (2016, November 13). Uncommon Ground. *The New York Times*, p. 72.
- Schon, D. (1983). From technical rationality to reflection in action. In *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action* (pp. 21–69). New York: Basic Books.
- Stafford, L., & Mariano, W. (2017, August 24). ATLANTA BELTLINE; Beltline CEO quits amid housing rift. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, p. 1A.
- Swyngedouw, E. (2005). Governance Innovation and the Citizen: The Janus Face of Governance-beyond-the-State. *Urban Studies*, 42(11), 1991–2006.
- Trubey, J. S. (2015, June 21). Rents rising with higher demand. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, p. 1D.
- Trubey, J. S., & Leslie, K. (2016, March 6). Redevelopment; Daunting task to rebuild Westside. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, p. 1A.
- Trudeau, D. (2018). Integrating social equity in sustainable development practice: Institutional commitments and patient capital. *Sustainable Cities and Society*, 41(May), 601–610. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2018.05.007>
- Wolff, E. N. (2017). *Household wealth trends in the United States, 1962 to 2016: Has middle class wealth recovered?* Cambridge, MA. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w24085>
- Zapata, M. A., & Bates, L. K. (2015). Equity Planning Revisited. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 35(3), 245–248. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X15589967>

APPENDIX: FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1 (p. 6). Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969). Retrieved from <http://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html>

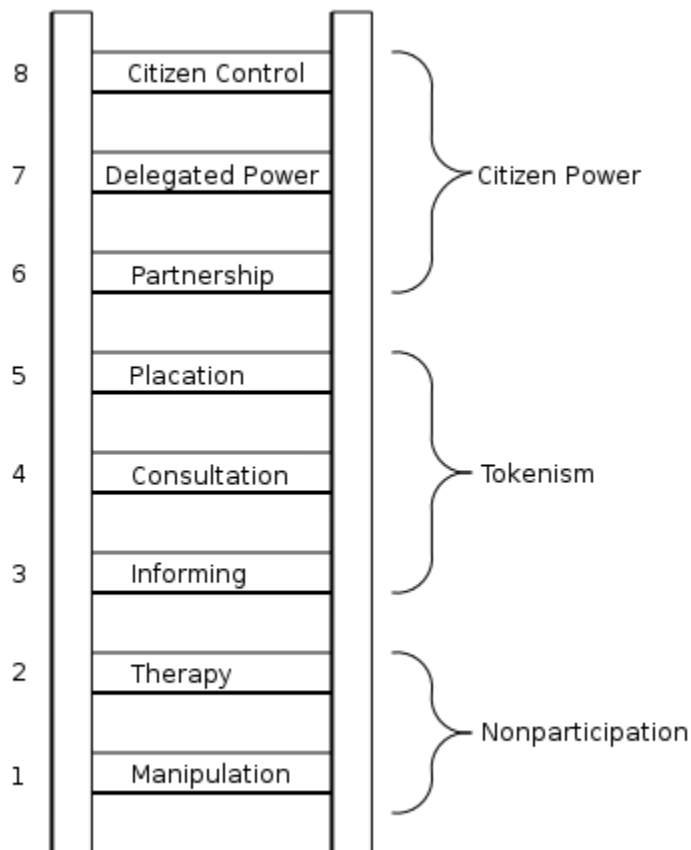


Figure 2. A map of the BeltLine loop and TAD. (Retrieved from BeltLine.org.)

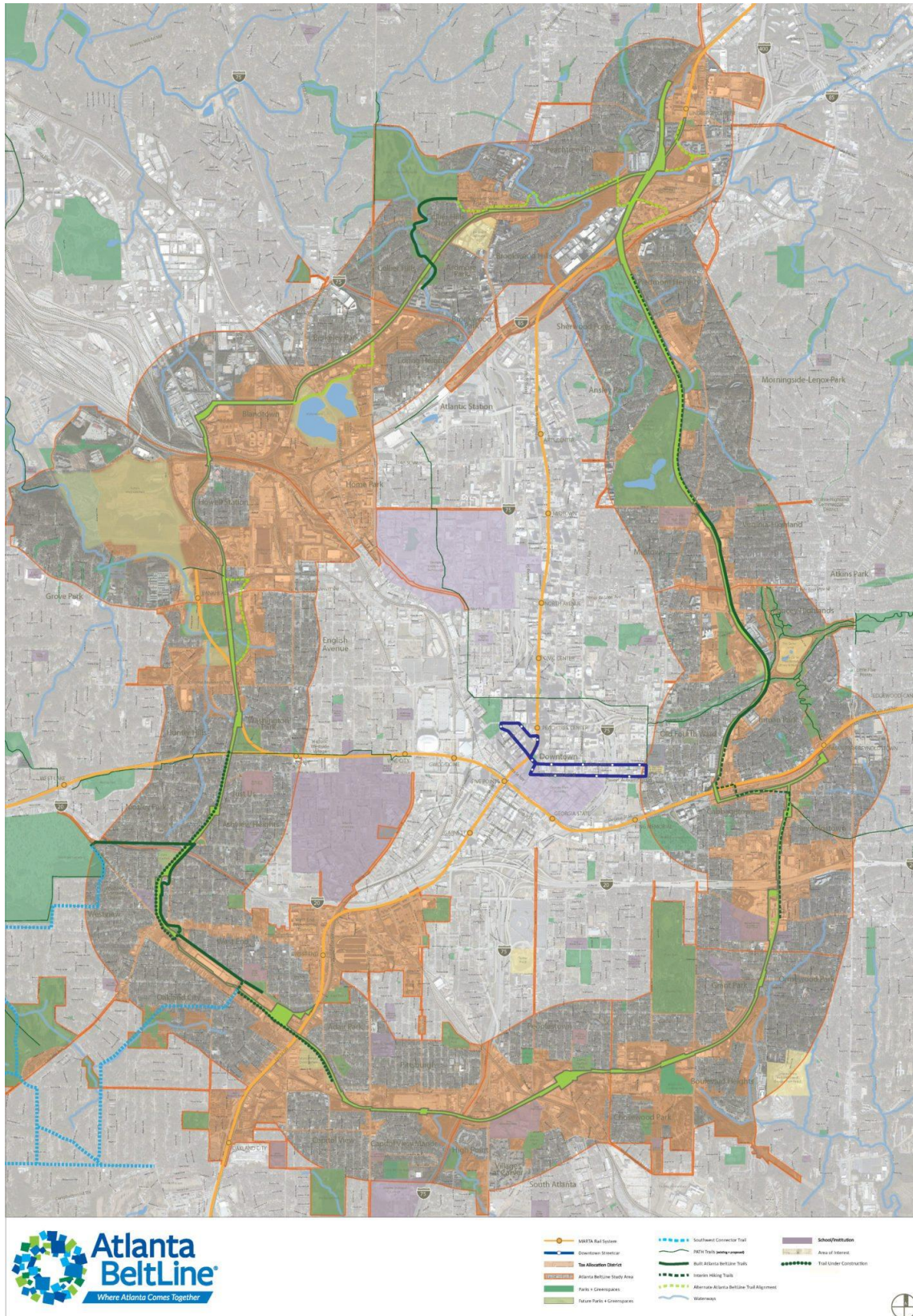


Figure 3. A map of the Eastside Trail. (Retrieved from BeltLine.org.)



Figure 4. A map of the Westside Trail. (Retrieved from BeltLine.org.)



SOUTHWEST CONNECTOR SPUR TRAIL

The multi-use trail portion (marked with a solid purple line) is 1.15 miles in length.

On-street portion with sharrows (marked with a dashed purple line) is 1.6 miles in length.



WESTSIDE + WEST END TRAILS

The Westside Trail (marked with a solid, light blue line) is 3 miles long and runs north to south in the old railroad corridor with the exception of 0.5 miles that utilizes the West End Trail.

The West End Trail (marked with a solid purple line) is a spur trail that is 2.4 miles and connects to the Southwest Connector Spur Trail via on-street, sharrowed bike lanes.



Figure 5. Atlanta BeltLine Inc.'s Community Engagement Framework (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2018d). Retrieved from <http://beltlineorg-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Community-Engagement-Framework-Chart-1.pdf>

Expanded Atlanta BeltLine Planning & Community Engagement Framework*

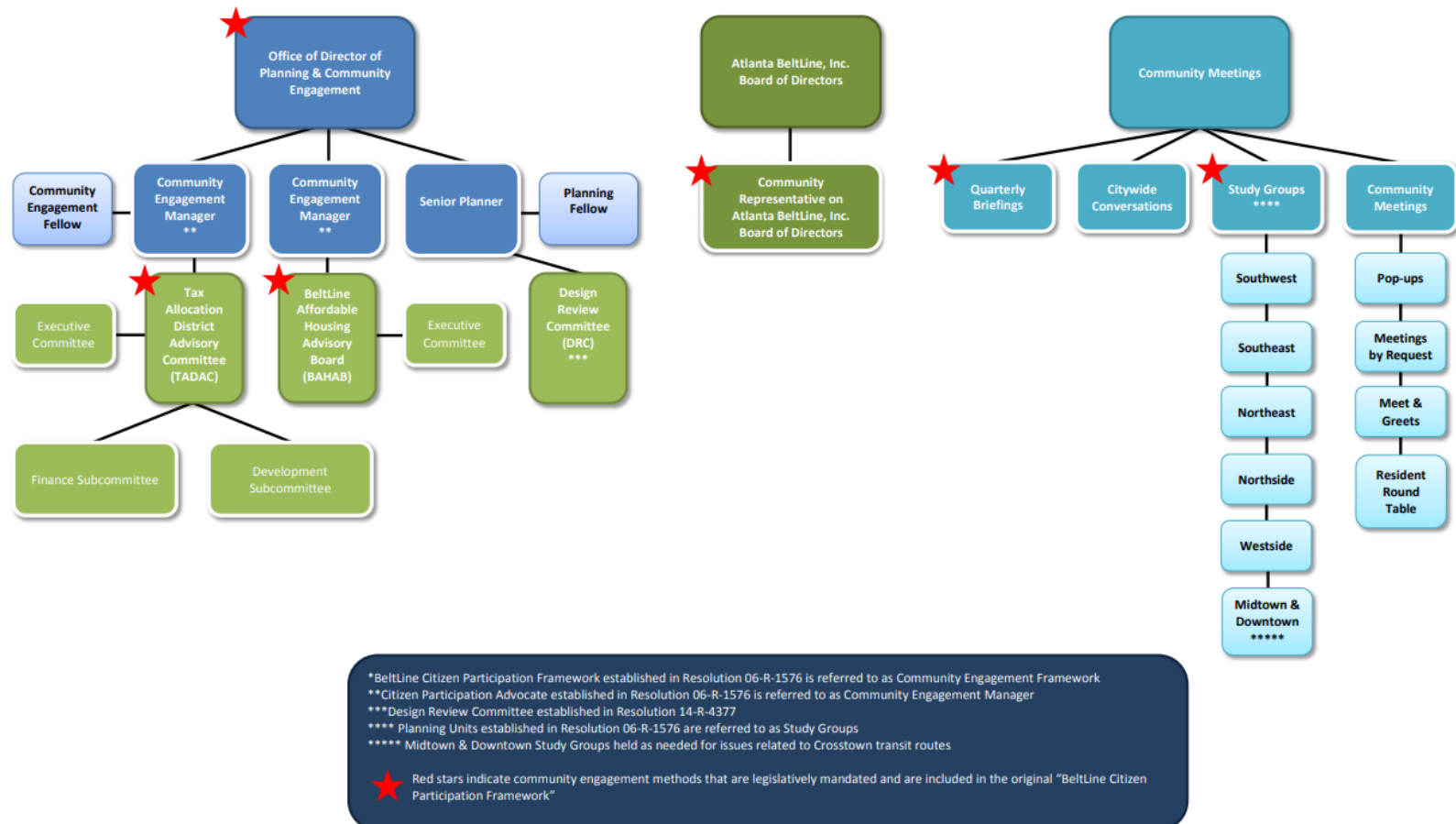


Figure 6. A broad typology that describes how interviewees have interacted with the Atlanta BeltLine’s community engagement process. On one end of the spectrum is “organizational,” referring to interviewees who have more established positions within the community engagement framework. On the other end is “community,” which refers to interviewees who participate in the community engagement framework from a more external perspective. Interviewees have been “placed” along the spectrum by the author.

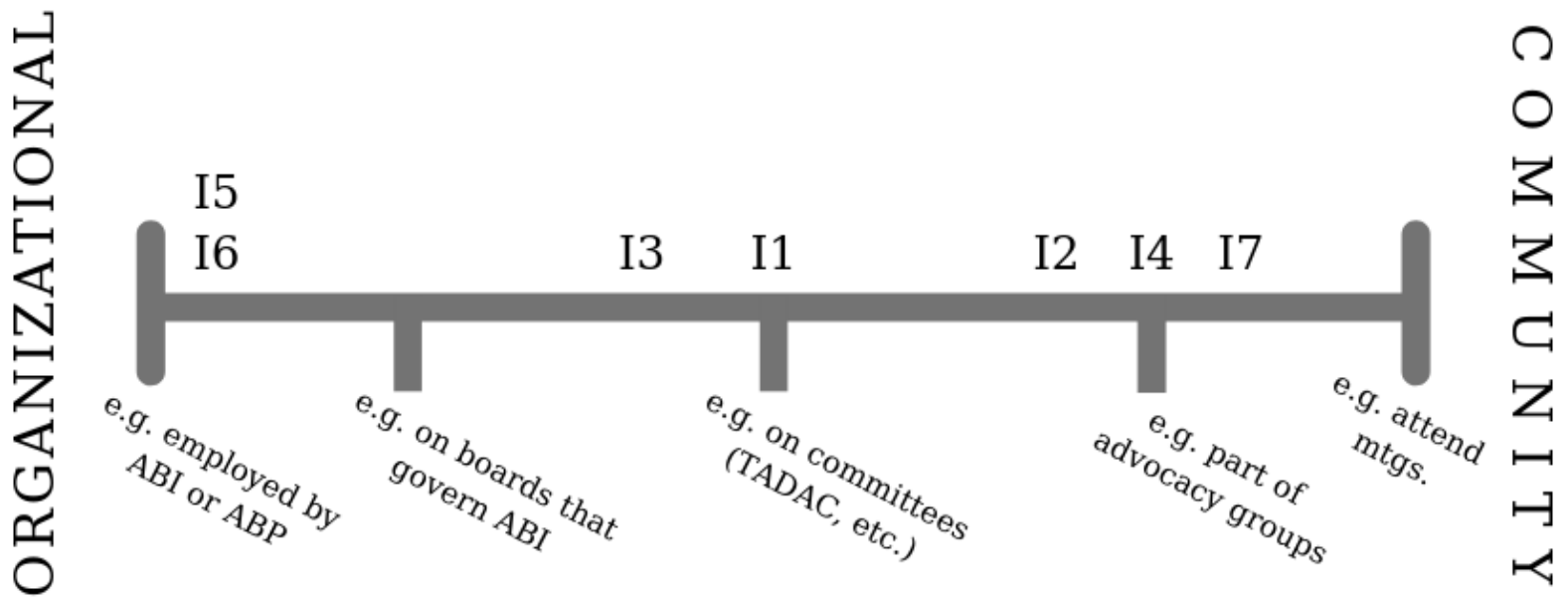


Table 1 (p. 4-12). Summaries and classifications of theoretical approaches to community engagement in planning processes. Developed by the author.

Theoretical Foundation	Author	Year	Core Concepts
Pre-communicative planning	Davidoff	1965	Pluralism in planning: enabling communities to plan for themselves
	Arnstein	1969	Ladder of Citizen Participation: some forms of participation restrict power; planners must choose those that bestow power on community members
	Krumholz	1982	Planners must fight for equity, putting pressure on leaders to expand citizen choice
Communicative planning	Forester	1982	Planners knowingly and unknowingly perpetuate inequitable systems of power
	Schon	1983	Reflection-in-action: new information is constantly changing the best course of action
	Healey	1992	Collaborative planning: community members can be partners in planning processes
	Forester	1999	Techniques that subvert inequity are rooted in deliberation, stories, and listening
	Sanoff	2000	Techniques must utilize principles of behavior change to expand participation
	Forester	2013	Critical pragmatism: intentions behind actions are less important than those actions' impact
Critique 1 of comm. planning	Innes & Booher	2004	Strategies that "transform" planning processes beyond neoliberalism
	Quick & Feldman	2011	Difference between participation and inclusion
	Benner & Pastor	2015	Principled conflict: transcend ideology through Roots, Relationship, and Reason
Critique 2 of comm. planning	Swyngedouw	2005	Neoliberal ideology disperses across institutional "ensembles" limits the power of individuals and communities
	Ghose	2005	Neoliberal ideology is reinforced in planning by public-private partnerships, restricting rights
	Elwood	2005	Inequality is produced and reproduced; planners must develop practices to disrupt it
Modern definitions of equity	Powell	1999	Reciprocal relationship between sprawl and racialized concentrated poverty
	Brand	2015	Planners and communities define equity differently; privileged communities define equity differently than underprivileged communities; privileged voices must be deemphasized
Case studies	Roy	2015	The Atlanta BeltLine operates under a neoliberal planning process and structure
	Anderson et al.	2016	Consensus coerces individuals into agreeing to what they normally would not; "dissensus" must be pursued instead
	Trudeau	2018	In sustainable development projects, leading organizations must prioritize social equity from beginning to end

Table 2 (p. 21-31). Brief summaries of main findings from interviewees. Developed by the author.

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Takeaways
Differing definitions of equity	Equity as geographical	The BeltLine is or is not addressing needs across its four "quadrants" equally.
	Equity as racial or class-based	The BeltLine is or is not addressing needs of underprivileged communities equally to those of privileged communities.
	Equity as awareness of the BeltLine	The BeltLine is or is not known equally well by citizens across the city.
Perceptions of the BeltLine's purpose	On-board with ABI's mission	Those who are "on-board" with the BeltLine's New Urbanism vision can more easily shape the project.
	Not-on-board with ABI's mission	Those who advocate for one pillar of the BeltLine's mission (e.g. affordable housing) face more opposition to having their ideas included.
Lack of creativity in community engagement	(n/a)	The BeltLine's engagement strategies are much better than they were when they first started, but they still do not reach those most in need of engagement.
Knowledge of development process	Appropriate timing	Some suggest that feedback is best given at the start of a project, before construction has begun. Others suggest there is still more to be done, and flexibility to do it.
	Appropriate leaders	Feedback must be directed at the appropriate individuals, agencies, or planning bodies. ABI can only do so much.
	Appropriate dialogue	Planning agencies must be transparent about their motives and capabilities, but community members must be understanding of challenges that agencies face.
	Funding conditionalities	Some funding comes with strings attached. Knowing about funding sources can help community members engage effectively.
Leadership	(n/a)	Different leaders have brought various strengths, weaknesses, and general philosophies behind the importance of community engagement.